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*The Soteriological Significance
of the Cross of Jesus.
Metaphor, Meaning and Salvation.*

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Contents

Introduction	Pages	3-10
Chapter 1. <i>Metaphors and Models</i>	Pages	11-39
Chapter 2. <i>The Enigma of Sacrifice</i>	Pages	40-76
Chapter 3. <i>Ransom and Rescue</i>	Pages	77-107
Chapter 4. <i>The Power of Love</i>	Pages	108-138
Chapter 5. <i>The Crucified Scapegoat</i>	Pages	139-183
Chapter 6. <i>Wounds that Heal</i>	Pages	184-233
Chapter 7. <i>Reconciliation</i>	Pages	234-282
Conclusion	Pages	283-287
Bibliography	Pages	288-297

“That God could create beings free over against himself is the Cross which philosophy could not bear but upon which it has remained hanging.”¹

Introduction

The Nicene Creed (AD 325), expressly states that Jesus Christ “for our salvation came down from heaven” and that He “was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried and the third day He rose again, according to the scriptures.” Here the structure and sequence of soteriological events are explicitly stated in creedal formulation, where Christ’s crucifixion holds the strategic centre point, where Jesus not only dies, but dies for our salvation. The Cross is the emblematic sign of Christian authenticity, the kernel of the kerygma of faith and paradoxically the preferred mechanism that God uses for salvation. Indeed, St Paul proclaimed to the world in the first century: “We preach Christ crucified a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”² Even in the Gospels the apparent contradictory sign of the Messiah being nailed to a tree is highlighted, with taunts from onlookers and the last satanic temptation, to “save yourself and come down from the Cross”,³ is used to psychologically torment him in a last ditch attempt to abort the salvific enterprise; but salvation transparently can only come through the acceptance of the Cross.⁴ For as the great Spanish mystic and doctor of the Church St John of the Cross declares: “If you desire to possess Christ, never seek him without the Cross... whoever seeks not the

¹ Kierkegaard (1970) *Journals and Papers*, vol. II, ed. and trans, Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 58. (entry no.1237).

² 1 Corinthians 1:23-24.

³ Mark 15:30, see also Mathew 27:42-43 & Luke 23:35.

⁴ Brown, Raymond E. (1986), *A Crucified Christ in Holy Week. Essays on the Four Gospel Passion Narratives*. The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 33.

Cross of Christ, also seeks not the glory of Christ.”⁵ Jesus indicates the magnetic pull of the Cross when he says in his own words: “and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself”,⁶ thus indicating the portal or ladder to heaven that the Cross symbolizes, where the divine glory⁷ shines diaphanously through the wood of the Cross. “It is as well to remember, however, that when we speak about the glory of God we are in fact speaking about the disclosure of his nature, which means that in his death, Jesus glorifies God and he himself is glorified; in other words, we see here the nature of God, and the nature of his Son. The glory of God is revealed.”⁸ On Good Friday the centrality and instrumentality of the Cross is venerated, “behold the wood of the Cross on which hung the saviour of the world.”⁹

The Cross is thus heavily laden with soteriological significance but we should never look at the Cross without being reminded of the resurrection,¹⁰ for the death and resurrection of Christ cannot be separated, since both are part of the mysterious purpose of God.¹¹ Indeed it has been argued that the gospel tradition was formed “backwards”, starting from Jesus’ resurrection and working toward his birth.¹² And for this reason the Cross and resurrection are two dimensions of the one single saving reality and are, therefore, necessary to illuminate each other. Karl Rahner stipulates this when he says: “From this perspective, if the fate of Jesus has any soteriological

⁵ St John of The Cross (*Otros Avios y Sentencias*, sentence 83 & 84), cited in Stein, Edith (2002), *The Science of the Cross*, ICS Publications, Washington D.C., 282.

⁶ John 12:32.

⁷ “I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do; and now Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made.” John 17:3-5.

⁸ Hooker, Morna D. (1994), *Not Ashamed of the Gospel. New Testament Interpretations of the Death of Christ*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 95.

⁹ The dramatic unveiling and adoration of the Cross on Good Friday was introduced into the Latin liturgy in the seventh or eight century but has its origins in the Church of Jerusalem at the close of the fourth century.

¹⁰ Hume, Cardinal Basil (1998), *The Mystery of The Cross*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 21.

¹¹ Hooker, 18.

¹² Brown (1986), 9.

significance at all, this significance can be situated neither in the death nor in the resurrection taken separately, but can only be illuminated now from the one and now from the other aspect of this single event.”¹³ However, for the purposes of this thesis it will be necessary to focus exclusively on the significance of the Cross to establish what is happening at this point in the drama of salvation. Yet it must always be remembered that it was the resurrection that transformed the tragedy of Christ’s death into a triumph, where the reality of the resurrection reversed and overturned the apparent supremacy of evil, and the kingdom of violence, with that of the abiding peace of the kingdom of heaven.¹⁴ “The New Testament writers are united in insisting that the Cross is at the heart of the gospel: if the death of Christ is meaningless without the resurrection, so, too, the resurrection depends for its significance on the crucifixion.”¹⁵ For although it appeared that he died because it was the will of God that he should die,¹⁶ albeit at the hands of wicked men; “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring us to God”, (1 Peter 3:18). On one level Jesus in his death makes dying and death itself a holy thing,¹⁷ but at a more profound level, death because it is a distortion and curse, should not be seen as a welcome deliverance from life itself,¹⁸ for Christ came to bring life in abundance,¹⁹ and not celebrate death or elevate it to a position of desirability. Death is definitively the last enemy which Jesus victoriously conquers.²⁰ “If death had been

¹³ Rahner, Karl (2006), *Foundations of Christian Faith. An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, Crossroad, New York, 266.

¹⁴ “Jesus came and stood among them, ‘Peace be with you’, when he had said this he showed them his hands and his side.” John 20:19-20.

¹⁵ Hooker, 140.

¹⁶ Ibid., 15, 17, and Stott, John (1986), *The Cross of Christ*, Intervarsity Press, Nottingham, England, 42. See also: Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:28.

¹⁷ Hume, 26.

¹⁸ Brown (1986), 9.

¹⁹ “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life and abundantly.” John 10:10.

²⁰ “‘Death is swallowed up in victory’. ‘O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?’” 1 Corinthians 15:54-55

overcome and Christ was alive, the curse had also been annulled and changed to blessing. The scandal of the gospel of a crucified Messiah was in fact no scandal but gospel – good news for the world.”²¹

The New Testament contributors and the early post apostolic Church, therefore, had a firm double base in the teaching of Christ and his apostles for making the Cross the unmistakable sign and symbol of Christianity.²² “In the influential though apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus that narrates the descent of Christ to Hades, there is a description of Christ applying the sign of the Cross on the foreheads of Adam, the prophets and patriarchs of old, the forefathers, the martyrs and all the righteous in Hades, so that they may enter heaven.”²³ Indeed, throughout history the sign of the Cross has been seen as a mark of Christian identity.²⁴ It was Constantine, the first Christian emperor, who, according to his biographer Eusebius of Caesarea, on the eve of the Battle of the Milvian bridge (October 28 AD 312) saw a cross of light in the sky along with the words *in hoc signo vinces*,²⁵ which he immediately used as an emblem on his shields for which he later attributed to his military success. Since then the Cross has become the exclusive mark of Christianity, although its soteriological significance has a mysterious theological depth which needs to be plumbed with care and exactness. Samuel Zwemer summarises the centrality of the Cross in these words: “If the Cross of Christ is anything to the mind, it is surely everything the most profound reality and the sublimest mystery. One comes to realize that literally all the wealth and glory of the gospel centres here. The Cross is the pivot as well as the

²¹ Hooker, 13.

²² Stott, 50.

²³ Andreopoulos, Andreas (2006), *The Sign of The Cross. The Gesture, The Mystery, The History*, Paraclete Press, Brewster, Massachusetts, 110.

²⁴ Ibid., 72.

²⁵ In this sign you will conquer.

centre of New Testament thought. It is the exclusive mark of the Christian faith, the symbol of Christianity and its cynosure.”²⁶

To explore and navigate around the soteriological significance of the Cross is a complex theological journey of discovery into the region of the Church’s teaching on the atonement. I shall attempt to salvage the hidden treasures found in the deep waters²⁷ of the Church’s tradition, where it can be likened to diving at extraordinary depths, where one can be left giddy and disorientated. “Deep-sea divers tell of a certain depth at which the human brain becomes possessed of the illusion that natural breathing is again possible. When this happens, the diver removes his helmet and drowns. He is inebriate with a fatal enchantment called *le vertige des grandes profondeurs*, ‘the vertigo of the great deeps’. Masters of scholastic reading and explication knew this dizziness.”²⁸ It is easy to see why one can be engulfed by this sensation of being overwhelmed, and this is in part due to the fact that the Church herself has never compressed and allowed to be crystallised out, a concise doctrinal statement of its own teaching on the atonement. This lack of definition and clarity has led to a position where a variety of legitimate explanations of the saving significance of Jesus’ Cross have circulated, at different points in the history of doctrine. The sheer scope of the different metaphors and soteriological models²⁹ of understanding that have been brought to bear, some of which are complementary, some overlapping, some openly in competition with each other and some evidently contradictory, indicates the complexity of the project. What it also indicates is that there has been an evolution in the doctrine of redemption where fixed points of certainty, like stars in

²⁶ Zwemer, Samuel M. (2006), *The Glory of the Cross*, Diggory Press, Cornwall, 3.

²⁷ Luke 5:4: “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”

²⁸ Steiner, George (1991), *Real Presences*, The University of Chicago Press, 43.

²⁹ Rahner (2006), 284.

the night sky, are not always where they appear to be. “The unlearned are apt to think of the dogmatic formulas with which they have been acquainted as fixed and immutable; but the history of doctrine shows that they have most of them changed their form from age to age, and nowhere is this more true than the doctrine of redemption.”³⁰

The problem for any student of the atonement is the multiplicity of biblical images such as redemption, ransom, sacrifice and victory which is compounded with the addition of other images such as satisfaction, transforming love, reconciliation, and scapegoating from different periods of theological reflection. They are often treated as if they are independent of each other, where one may be given primacy or used as a coordinating metaphor which subsumes others. They either stand alone as monolithic systems or are combined and held in tension to one another. In some cases apparently unrelated images are put together, that ordinarily would resist merger, thereby obscuring the already fuzzy and uncertain subject area. There is little attempt at rationalisation, standardisation and systemisation because it is believed that they are fundamentally unconnected to each other, bearing no essential relationship. “To reveal some of the serious problems associated with addressing this doctrine through just one interpretation or through an array of unconnected theories, images or metaphors. The tendency is either to make the doctrine unrealistically transparent or impenetrably opaque. Such a situation is bound to impoverish the proclamation of this central doctrine of the Christian faith.”³¹ Here is the tacit assumption that there exists an irreducible pluralism of images which offer partial glimpses through a variety of

³⁰ Foley, George Cadwalader (1909), *Anselm's Theory of the Atonement*, Longmans, Green and Co. New York, 3.

³¹ Terry, Justyn 2007, *The Justifying Judgement of God. A Reassessment of the Place of Judgement in the Saving Work of Christ*, Paternoster Theological Monographs, 44.

hermeneutical windows, all necessary so as to better grasp the soteriological significance of the Cross. These images of the atonement are best understood themselves as metaphors or models of the atonement, which are paradigmatic systems designed to interpret what is both objectively and subjectively happening on and around the Cross of Jesus. My task in this thesis is to separate and analyse the main lines of soteriological enquiry that orbit the Cross, and to come to a contemporary position which best expresses what is the nature of the exchange that secures humanity's salvation. I will firstly examine the cogency of using metaphors in atonement theology itself and then critically evaluate what I consider to be the most convincing metaphors for interpreting the work of Jesus on the Cross. This will necessarily include a detailed exposition of: sacrifice, victory and ransom, the alluring model of transforming love, as proposed by Abelard, and finally the theory of satisfaction that was expounded by his medieval competitor and counterpart Anselm, the then Archbishop of Canterbury.

I shall also consider one of the freshest and keenest insights formulated by the cultural anthropologist, René Girard, on "The Scapegoat" and although it has its roots in the historic Hebrew Day of Atonement, is a device so ubiquitous in human culture that God adopts it so as to break the spell of violence that it begets. It thus reveals the darkest sin and current that lurks under the surface of society, namely violence, where God breaks the machinery of sacrifice once and for all whilst simultaneously exposing humanity's inherent blood lust. Perhaps the only new insight in my whole thesis is the claim that the rule of St Benedict was instrumental, or at least influential, on the construction of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*? I can find no other author who alludes to this, although I do not develop it myself, for my purpose is to come to a sharper

understanding of how the Cross works as a soteriological tool. My premise from the outset is that a cluster of metaphors are necessary, so as to do full justice to the richness of atonement theology. After all, that is why the Church in her wisdom has elected not to opt for one metaphor to the exclusion or detriment of others. However, I will come off the fence and suggest which metaphors are the most deserving whilst dismissing others. In particular the penal substitution theory that has its roots with the Benedictine monk, Anselm, where the death of Christ becomes the critical moment to secure salvation. I cannot exclusively endorse one metaphor (for example sacrifice) as a controlling model over others, despite sacrifice remaining a vivid image in the popular psyche, even in a post-Christian and religiously indifferent secular culture. Yet it is perhaps the way in which the investigation proceeds and the study pursued in this thesis that adds to its novelty and I hope clarity; where the teaching of the atonement is didactically presented in such a way that the full soteriological significance of the Cross of Jesus, and the greatest teacher of all, can be better revealed.³²

³² “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him.” John 3:2.

Chapter 1. Metaphors and Models

The Cross has indisputably become the supreme and universal symbol of salvation for Christianity. However, why Jesus had to die the ignominious death of execution on a cross in order to heal the breach between God and humanity is at first glance unclear. It is, however, beyond dispute that the Cross stands at the mid-point of the Church's soteriological system, occupying the central ground for all to contemplate, indeed the epicentre and meeting point of Heaven and Hell. As Frank James puts it: "Christ fulfilled the law and brought together heaven and earth bridging the chasm between the holy God and sinful man."³³ The Cross then is the pivotal axis on which salvation turns, reversing that which has gone before and effectively bridging the gap between God and humanity. For this reason the doctrine of the Atonement³⁴ must remain at the centre of any Christian theology, proclaiming the liberating grace of God that is freely undertaken and thereby resisting any Pelagian notion of self-salvation. The work that is accomplished on the Cross is from first to last the work of God the liberator, albeit through the God-Man, Jesus Christ.³⁵

Jesus' death may have finally opened the eschatological gates of paradise, that which was lost through Adam,³⁶ but *how* this is achieved and what *exactly* happens at this locus between the human person and God has to be examined with some forensic exactness. Moreover, we may legitimately ask where does the Incarnation and his

³³ Frank A. James, in Hill, Charles E. & James, Frank A. (Editors), (2004), *The Glory of the Atonement*, Intervarsity Press, Illinois, 405.

³⁴ For the purposes of this thesis I shall take atonement to mean the bringing together of two parties that have been estranged, literally at-one-ment.

³⁵ "The doctrine of the Atonement must continue to be at the heart of Christian Theology." Gunton, Colin (1988), *The Actuality of the Atonement*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 101.

³⁶ Soteriology is from the Greek *Soteria*, Salvation.

active ministry fit into this equation and is the Resurrection a mere afterthought or at best a ratification of what is accomplished on the Cross? The Church throughout her history has prudently resisted one all encompassing dogmatic declaration which seeks to pin down, for all time, any formulation that sums up her teaching on the Atonement. Understanding the Cross cannot be reducible to one definitive interpretation because the Cross is essentially a saturated phenomena.³⁷ Other doctrinal statements in comparison have been articulated with precision and enthusiasm, such as the Christological and Trinitarian declarations from the great councils of Nicaea (AD 325) and Chalcedon, (AD 451), albeit without first a process of refinement through disputations, most of which were messy and bitter. Rival camps have notoriously jostled for position to claim the ultimate prize of having their own theological insights pronounced orthodox, only then to have the satisfaction of knowing that these insights could be recited in creedal form in perpetuity. In the area of the atonement theology, the Church has resisted the temptation to endorse any one exclusive position, thereby giving space for a creative tension between the variety of competing models which exist side by side.³⁸ This absence of any dogmatic pronouncement is a catalyst for each generation to grasp anew the perennial relevance and full force of the staurocentric³⁹ position of its own soteriological heritage. Each ecclesial community has to grapple with the metaphors that have been, and the metaphors that will inevitably come, in their attempt to communicate the paradoxical wisdom of Christ crucified.⁴⁰

³⁷ “The Cross is a non reductive, saturated phenomenon that refuses to be assimilated by medieval or modern theories alike.” Tracy, David, cited in Hill, 401.

³⁸ Gunton, 1988, 111.

³⁹ From the Greek: “Cross-centred”.

⁴⁰ 1 Corin. 1:23-25.

This tendency to body swerve away from clearly defined creedal formulations in the area of atonement theology could suggest a lack of certainty about how Jesus' death helps us either *objectively*, by securing our redemption, and then *subjectively* guaranteeing its appropriation in the lives of individual believers. Conversely, it could be argued that the rich significance of the atonement is so complex and mysteriously profound⁴¹ that no one sharp creedal statement of faith would do; no once and for all doctrinal declaration would be sufficient to articulate the full significance of what is achieved for us on the Cross, no matter how crisp and focused the balance of words. For this reason "no one metaphor should be allowed to dominate the other. Whatever tension we feel between the various images for thinking about the atonement must not be relaxed, but rather endured."⁴² This composite or multi-strata quality of atonement language can at first appear confusing until it is remembered that the Church's tradition is not a static phenomena but in fact a living one. Tradition is not a dead deposit from which to quarry but a vital and organic entity that ensures that the Church has the capacity to adapt to a new generation and speak meaningfully in an idiom that is understood. Each generation is historically embedded in a specific cultural milieu which demands more than just the repetition of tried and tested formulas; it also requires new insights to help uncover that original deposit of faith more fully. This desire not to just repeat tired and worn out phrases, indicates that the Church's teaching on the atonement cannot be completely exhausted;⁴³ rather, to limit atonement to one formulation alone would be to effectively gag or muzzle the tradition. Colin Gunton puts it more savagely "to insist on the static continuity of one

⁴¹ Evans, Stephen (1996), *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History*, Clarendon, Oxford, 96-97.

⁴² Vanhoozer, cited in Hill, 370-371.

⁴³ Green, Joel & Baker, Mark (2000), *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, Paternoster Press, Cumbria. P114.

particular expression would be to strangle the tradition”.⁴⁴ Yet no matter what aspect of theology we may seek to articulate we are limited by the language we are using. In the final analysis all we have is words and in the circumstances of soteriology, language that pertains to atonement heavily draws on the semantics of metaphor,⁴⁵ and to be a master of metaphor is to have the spark of genius, as Aristotle states in his *Poetics*.⁴⁶

George Steiner in his book *Real Presences* begins with the image of discarded words inhabiting the forgotten and abandoned spaces of our lexical house, like fading characters that linger as a haunting reminder that they too once possessed vitality and relevance. “Vacant metaphors, eroded figures of speech, inhabit our vocabulary and grammar. They are caught, tenaciously, in the scaffolding and recesses of our common parlance. There they rattle about like old rags or ghosts in the attic.”⁴⁷ Theology has never had any other medium with which to operate other than what language can provide, where the tools of metaphor, analogy, symbol and myth are used in the craft of constructing meaningful statements. The process is ongoing, as the community of faith energetically persists in seeking to communicate the kerygma of faith in new and arresting ways that are evocative, relevant and invariably poetic. “For metaphysics can express its objects in no other way than by images, but it pulls its images to pieces and strips them down in the exact endeavour to conform to the

⁴⁴ Gunton, 1988, 111.

⁴⁵ “The rhetoric of metaphor takes the word as its unit of reference. Metaphor, therefore, is classed among the single-word figures of speech and is defined as a trope of resemblance. As figure, metaphor constitutes a displacement and an extension of the meaning of words; its explanation is grounded in a theory of substitution.” Ricoeur, P. (2007), *The Rule of Metaphor. The Creation of Meaning in Language*, Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon, 1.

⁴⁶ “But the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars.” Aristotle (1987), *Poetics*, trans. R. Janko, Hackett, Indianapolis and Cambridge (1459 a 5-8).

⁴⁷ Steiner, 3.

realities ... The subjective process of inspiration is essentially poetical, the content it communicates is metaphysical.”⁴⁸ Metaphor,⁴⁹ in particular, is one of the fundamental ways in which we interpret reality and the world around us, thereby demonstrating that language is by its very nature a dialectical force that seeks to create new ways of communicating old certainties. “Metaphor is the vital principle in all living languages. It is the verbal expression of the process and products of the imagination with its powers of creative synthesis ... Metaphor is thus the dynamic, synthetic and creative force in language.”⁵⁰ Although at times difficult to interpret or rationalise, good metaphors are essential to communicate meaning and reality itself, for they are foundational building-blocks which can be constructed and organised into sophisticated hermeneutical systems. “When in ordinary speech we want to make significant meaningful assertions, we do so in the form of metaphor. Metaphors can be unravelled into similes or expanded into symbols. Symbols and similes can be elaborated with some philosophical and theological sophistication into analogies. Analogies can be developed into models and these models become the building blocks of theology and doctrine.”⁵¹

Metaphors then, are the most basic elements in any theological tool kit for they seek to articulate cognitive belief that would remain unuttered and incoherent without their existence. “The metaphorical mode of language has ontological relevance insofar as through it a new context of being is disclosed, grounded in a gain to language. The new (metaphorical) use of a word gives this word a new meaning and with this new

⁴⁸ Farrer, A. (1948), *The Glass of Vision*, Dacre Press, London, 148.

⁴⁹ Soskice defines metaphor as: “that trope, or figure of speech, in which we speak of one thing in terms suggestive of another.” Soskice, Janet Martin (1987), *Metaphor and Religious Language*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 15, 54.

⁵⁰ Stanford, W.B. (1936), *Greek Metaphor; Studies in Theory and Practice*, Blackwell, Oxford, 100.

⁵¹ Avis, Paul (1999), *God and the Creative Imagination. Metaphor, Symbol and Myth in Religion and Theology*, Routledge, London and New York, 76.

meaning new being is brought to speech.”⁵² Metaphors which succeed in being purposeful and relevant must have a certain creative thrust, for without this imaginative fecundity they become flattened out, sterile and inevitably falter. Their job is always to be evocative of presence and truth, and like symbol and myth (their semantic counterparts) they exist to reveal reality, to give voice to being itself.⁵³ Yet metaphors like symbols, although basic constituents of language, are not all of the same quality or calibre; some are purer than others; indeed some may even be harmful or counterproductive as truth transmitters carrying a negative load. Marc Bleth cautions us to be on the alert to becoming entangled in a web of metaphors of our own construction, for inadvertently they may hoodwink us into believing that they have constructed a literalist and absolute grasp of reality. “Not to recognise metaphors, but to speak or write them is to be used by those metaphors and to be entangled in them. To recognise them is to use them, consciously alert to the influence and consequences of their use Indeed, a dead metaphor, a metaphor transferred into a literal statement is clearly mythic.”⁵⁴ The ability to discriminate and recognise the value and appropriateness of individual metaphors is an acquired skill, likened to that of a dilettante or connoisseur of fine things, you simply know when you are in the presence of something good.⁵⁵ For the theological community this has a more pressing concern, for although it may be a complex process to identify the worth of anyone one metaphor, the history of tradition and orthodoxy has taught us that some metaphors are more indispensable than others. Indeed, some distort truth claims and need to be discarded as being inappropriate. These fugitive metaphors obscure rather

⁵² Webster, J. (1985), ‘Eberhard Jungel on the Language of Faith,’ *Modern Theology* 1, 261.

⁵³ “From this conjunction of fiction and redescription I conclude that the ‘place’ of metaphor, its most intimate and ultimate abode, is neither the name, nor the sentence, nor even the discourse, but the copula of the verb to *be*.” Ricoeur, P. 2007, 6.

⁵⁴ Bleth, Marc (1977), *The Process of Thinking*, David McKay company, New York, 80.

⁵⁵ See Ramsay, Ian (1964), *Models and Mystery*, Oxford University Press, 17.

than elucidate communication and represent a dangerous twist in the doctrinal track that if followed would terminate in a heretical dead end.⁵⁶ What is important to grasp, from an epistemological point of view, is that there can be no raw and unfiltered experience of reality. Everything, even the experience of the mystic, has to be sifted and mediated through the screen of metaphorical language that defies any attempt at a reduction to a more crude and literal expression. “Theologians above all need to recognise that any quest for greater and greater degrees of literalness is a wild-goose chase. All the significant assertions of theology are expressed in language that is irreducibly metaphorical.”⁵⁷

Despite this, there has always been a latent suspicion of metaphor, as if it were something inherently secondary or parasitic to meaning, a substitute for a more immediate and direct expression. It is suggestive of ornamentation and embellishments like gargoyles on cathedral roofs, something striking and theatrical but essentially superfluous. We unavoidably operate in a post modern linguistic universe that customarily talks in terms of the *mere metaphor*, the *empty symbol* and the *exploded myth* as if language had been drained of substance and metaphor was the froth that gave the mere illusion of depth. “Throughout the history of rhetoric, metaphor has been treated as a sort of happy extra trick with words, an opportunity to exploit the accidents of their versatility, something in place occasionally but requiring unusual skill and caution. In brief, a grace or ornament or added power of language, not its constitutive form.”⁵⁸ Metaphor can, therefore, conjure up something pejorative and dishonest as if something could and should be said in a more up front way. This

⁵⁶ McFague, Sallie (2007), *Speaking in Parables. A Study in Metaphor and Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 51.

⁵⁷ Avis, 76.

⁵⁸ Richards, I. A. (1936), *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, Oxford University Press, 121.

view has its legacy in the enlightenment when “Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and John Locke (1632-1704) vehemently dismissed metaphor as harmful to the cause of truth. Hobbes said that people abuse speech ‘when they use words metaphorically; that is, in any other sense than that they are ordained for; and thereby deceive others’.”⁵⁹ This fundamental idea that metaphors are words being used to substitute for others goes back even further, in fact right back to Aristotle of the classical period where in his work the Poetics he says: “a metaphorical term involves the transferred⁶⁰ use of a term that properly belongs to something else; the transference can be from genus to species, from species to genus, from species to species, or analogical.”⁶¹ Obviously the question which comes to mind is transference of what to what? Yet this statement demonstrates that in metaphoric meaning there is a process at work “not a momentary, static insight; it operates like a story, moving from here to there, from ‘what is’ to ‘what might be’.”⁶²

Metaphors in the modern mind have for too long been associated with myth and fable which pedal fantasy rather than perspicacity. Nietzsche was highly critical of the untruth that could be propagated by language and the illusion that metaphor could project. He illuminates by commenting: “A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of the human relations which become poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adorned ... truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions; worn out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the senses; coins which have their obverse effaced and have lost

⁵⁹ Stiver, Dan R. (1996), *The Philosophy of Religious Language. Sign, Symbol and Story*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 114.

⁶⁰ Etymologically metaphor (metaphora) literally means ‘transfer’ *meta* ‘trans’ and *pherin* ‘to carry’. Sostice, 1.

⁶¹ Aristotle, 1457 b 6-9.

⁶² McFague, 33.

their currency, becoming again mere bits of metal.”⁶³ The upshot of this is that no one metaphor can have the exclusive claim to be absolute, as this would render all others redundant; the reality is that we need a profusion of metaphors that are constantly being minted to be effective and kept up to date. Metaphors are notoriously short-lived and often die being reduced to their intrinsic base worth rather than continuing to communicate something revolutionary new. The flux of language as a living medium ensures that it is ever transforming and creative, seeking to incarnate its latest inspiration in a lexical form.⁶⁴ A sign that a metaphor has died is when it is to be found in a dictionary or lexicalised, although the sedimentation of ossified metaphors in dictionaries or even doctrines does not mean that they stay dead; they can be resurrected and reincarnated in a different epoch⁶⁵ throwing a renewed metaphorical punch. Indeed, it was the pioneering work of I. A. Richards in 1936 and Max Black in 1954-5, that rediscovered and reintegrated metaphor back to its original position, of being suggestive of a unique and often non-reducible way of speaking. Metaphors can reveal reality and evoke presence in a way that cannot be easily replicated. There was a renewed appreciation that metaphor is a vehicle of the cognitive. It has the power to communicate something breathtakingly new, often saying something that has not ever been said before in that way, and thereby enriching our understanding. “Metaphor, as we have described it, is the way of human knowing. It is not simply a way of embellishing something we can know in some other way. There is no other way. If this is so, then human knowledge (of whatever sort) has certain characteristics. It is

⁶³ Nietzsche, F. (1964), ‘*On Truth and Falsity in Their Ultramoral Sense*’. ed. O. Levy, *Complete Works*, vol.2, Russell and Russell, New York, 180.

⁶⁴ McFague, 54.

⁶⁵ Stiver, 121.

tentative, relativistic, multi-layered, dynamic, complex, sensuous, historical, and participatory.”⁶⁶

Metaphors then, have the extraordinary capacity to create new contextual meaning.⁶⁷ It is the novelty value of a lively metaphor to create new possibilities of understanding and interpretation of the world. “A good metaphor may not simply be an oblique reference to a predetermined subject but a new vision, the birth of a new understanding, a new referential access. A strong metaphor compels new possibilities of vision.”⁶⁸ Metaphor belongs to “the genesis of thought” and opens up reality in ways that are “hazardous, incomplete and thrilling”.⁶⁹ It is important that we locate metaphor in this context of knowing. A metaphor is not just a word, not even an image, but a conjunction of discourses, a joining of worlds.⁷⁰ I. A. Richards suggests that a metaphor is not so much an interaction between words as “a borrowing between, and intercourse of thoughts”, for it is primarily in the realm of thought that is metaphoric, where individual metaphors are derived and fashioned from its interplay.⁷¹ Metaphors are thus often a product of an intuitive act that resists reduction to a standard or a literalist meaning. They shatter and alter our understanding of reality itself. “When we ask whether metaphorical language reaches reality, we presuppose that we already know what reality is. But if we assume that metaphor redescribes reality, we must then assume that this reality as redescribed is itself novel reality. . . . With metaphor we experience the metamorphosis of both language and

⁶⁶ McFague, 62.

⁶⁷ Soskice, 33.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 57-58.

⁶⁹ Murray, M. (1937), *Countries of the Mind*, 2nd series, Oxford University Press, 1f.

⁷⁰ Avis, 97.

⁷¹ Richards, 94.

reality.”⁷² Living metaphors give emphasis and so awaken insight⁷³ giving a new and clearer way of seeing the world, expanding our frontiers of knowledge. Moreover, significantly, metaphors can become compressed and condensed into fertile symbols,⁷⁴ fortresses of understanding that become something abidingly serviceable. These in turn can evolve into models, which have the unique capacity to become reliable hermeneutical constructs for the interpretation of reality itself. In the domain of theology this is especially so, and in the realm of the atonement they are critical to a proper and fulsome soteriological understanding of the significance of the Cross.

Metaphors, and in particular atonement metaphors, seek to unpack the saving significance of the Cross and should never be written off as cosmetic commentaries, for they are crucial to underpinning our notion of what is being achieved by Jesus. They seek to translate the salvific reality of the atonement into an idiom that can be grasped, they are never merely extrinsic or ornamental. “The general lesson to be learned is that metaphors are not odd, unusual, improper or merely decorative. They are so pervasive as part of our experience that they are a, if not *the*, clue to what language is and does.”⁷⁵ Indeed, all disciplines use metaphor and models to enhance understanding, it is not simply the preserve of theology which could be dismissed as being quaint or out of touch. The sciences also draw heavily on metaphor in order to seek clarification.⁷⁶ As Ricoeur points out: “Metaphor is to poetic language what the model is to scientific reality. Now in scientific language, the model is essentially a

⁷² Ricoeur, P. (Summer 1973), “Creativity in Language: Word, Polysemy, Metaphor,” *Philosophy Today*, 110, 111.

⁷³ Black, M. (1962), *Models and Metaphors*, Ithaca, Cornell University, 44f.

⁷⁴ Avis, 105.

⁷⁵ Gunton, 1988, 32.

⁷⁶ Anthropomorphic metaphors abound for example in genetics where genes and DNA are made into intentional agents that *decide*, *choose* and *remember* or are even *ruthlessly selfish*. (See Dawkins, Richard (1989), *The Selfish Gene*, OUP, P3). Other metaphors come from the fields of communication and architecture, when genes are described as *text*, *letter*, and *library*.

heuristic instrument that seeks, by means of fiction, to break down an adequate interpretation and to lay the way of a new, more adequate interpretation.”⁷⁷ To use metaphor is, therefore, not a retreat into a theatrical world of private language games, as if they are words dressed up to do the rounds, but rather they are a robust attempt to engage head-on with reality. “We can comment upon the metaphor, but the metaphor itself neither needs nor invites explanation and paraphrase. Metaphorical thought is a distinctive mode of achieving insight, not to be construed as an ornamental substitute for plain thought.”⁷⁸ However, some metaphors that have been employed in the history of atonement theology have the ability to set alight the imagination, to speak more evocatively and persuasively than others. They have a promiscuous facility to capture some latent insight that cannot be easily overlooked, even when the cultural and historical setting that has acted as midwife to them has passed. Indeed, some metaphors can be said to have a certain staying power⁷⁹ and be called root metaphors from which others derive their relevance.

Some metaphors are particularly useful because they can function as a general paradigm or comprehensive sorting-house under which we can place a number of other metaphors that conveniently fit into the same group or family. “The complexity of the atonement requires that we use a constellation of metaphors. These constellations can be gathered under the umbrella of the most suggestive metaphors of the group, so-called root metaphors, which are particularly appealing in terms of

⁷⁷ Ricoeur, 2007, 283.

⁷⁸ Black, 237.

⁷⁹ “The simplest way to define a model is as a dominant metaphor, a metaphor with staying power.” McFague, Sallie (1982), *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 23.

describing the atonement.”⁸⁰ These root metaphors are sophisticated and complex enough to function as models.⁸¹ Root metaphors gather and organise other metaphors into clusters of meaning. However, it is not sufficient to squeeze or compress these root metaphors or models together in order to convey the fullness of atonement theology, for they are significantly different enough, not to be simply lumped together as if they are saying the same thing over and over again. In fact, it is often the case that other metaphors license other metaphors, mutating in a flurry of self-propagation in an attempt to maintain their ground in the field of contemporary communication. This creation of a new generation of metaphors is often in itself best explained by utilising other metaphors, which can give rise to the giddy and enclosed notion of “a circle of images”.⁸² For this reason theology must always be cautious about which metaphors to use, yet be ever ready to take on board new insights. “Theology must always be tentative and open to revision. One metaphor is usually best illuminated by another metaphor. The biblical metaphors thus have no sacrosanct value as literal terms. Their meaning is what is important. They actually license the creation of new metaphors that may in our time convey the reality conveyed by them in a better way.”⁸³

However, the metaphors that have been most serviceable and as a result those that have survived the longest, enjoying a more distinguished theological career, should not be easily dispensed with just because they seem mythological or socio-politically

⁸⁰ Boersma, Hans (2004), *Violence, Hospitality and the Cross. Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 109.

⁸¹ “Root metaphors thus become models. A model incorporates a number of other metaphors and thus forms a complex structure that can function as a paradigm or lens through which we can look at a particular doctrine.” Ibid., 108-109.

⁸² “The term ‘circle of images’ speaks to me not of the futility of symbolic theology - as though the theologian paces fretfully round and round the cage of images, longing to break out and to return to the wide plains of literal speech - The truth of Christian theology cannot be understood from outside the circle, but only by committing oneself in praxis to the symbolic process.” Avis, 137.

⁸³ Stiver, 132.

dated. In fact, successful metaphors evolve into models to guarantee their longevity. “Metaphors are employed only momentarily . . . but models are more fully elaborated and serve as wider interpretive schemes in many contexts . . . models offer ways of ordering experience and of interpreting the world. . . . They lead to conceptually formulated, systematic, coherent religious beliefs which can be criticized, analyzed and evaluated.”⁸⁴ Some metaphors have become so monolithic in their stature and serviceability in atonement theology, that they are supreme models of soteriological underpinning enjoying classical and abiding formulation e.g. sacrifice, victory, ransom, redemption, reconciliation, satisfaction and so on. They are so embedded within the tradition, and for good reason, that they should be respected as paradigms, for they are survivors and grandees of a rich theological heritage. Indeed, atonement theology can only claim to stand in continuity within an orthodox stream if it continues to build on the models that are rooted in scripture and tradition. It would be an impoverished and distorted legacy if redaction was done to the tradition itself, in a rash attempt to standardise and tidy up the apparent contradictory images that circulate in connection with atonement talk. We do well to heed Colin Gunton’s advice to “treasure our metaphors, particularly those which have, over the centuries, commended themselves as especially illuminating.”⁸⁵ Needless to say there is no reason to suggest that the soteriological canon is closed, new models could appear that will continue to inspire, be didactic of purpose and thus uncover further the mystery of salvation.⁸⁶ Indeed, some metaphors may appear to die, no longer taking centre stage only to be called to life again in a different time and place, thereby adding to the matrix of our understanding through further addition and reconstruction of ultimate reality. “In philosophical discourse, the rejuvenation of dead metaphors is particularly

⁸⁴ Barbour, I., cited in McFague, 84.

⁸⁵ Gunton, 1988, 39.

⁸⁶ McIntyre, John (1992), *The Shape of Soteriology*, T&T Clarke, Edinburgh, 62.

interesting when these metaphors supply the semantic addition. Reanimated metaphor once again functions as fable and as redescription, which characterize living metaphor, and leaves behind its function of mere addition at the level of denomination.”⁸⁷ Using metaphor is thus a rhetorical process which unleashes a power to redscribe reality which is both cognitive and affective, appealing to our mind’s eye and emotions, and this is equally true in the realm of atonement theology.

Why there have been different metaphors or models that have successfully spoken to generations hints at the complexity of the project. It is not sufficient simply to pile on the metaphors so we can, as it were, stand on them to improve our view; but we can at least say that the models themselves provocatively lead us towards the saving reality of Jesus on the Cross, albeit in slightly different ways. They work because they glimpse that reality and shed light on it by drawing our attention to yet another *view point*. Indeed, it would be better to say that the models each describe the same atoning work of Christ but from a different perspective,⁸⁸ and more pertinent still, often from a different historical locus. These metaphors or models do, however, have a notional relationship of complementarity to each other in the sense that they are all necessary in helping us to grasp the soteriological import of the Cross. At times these models may clash and even appear contradictory, yet collectively they provide a broader vision granting us different horizons from which to view the Cross of Christ.⁸⁹ Let us turn to these root metaphors or models that have been so tantalisingly compelling in the history of atonement theology, and in particular those that have enjoyed the sheer brute stamina to survive. More trenchantly still, where, when and why have these metaphors emerged when they did?

⁸⁷ Ricoeur, P. (2007), 345.

⁸⁸ Boersma, 113.

⁸⁹ McIntyre, 1992, 66.

The historical and cultural contextualization of atonement metaphors

When analysing the etymological origin of the most successful metaphors that have been utilised in the history of atonement theology throughout the centuries, it becomes apparent they have been drawn from various worlds and disciplines. They have been successful not only because they are relevant, but because they embody a creative thrust and have the power to evoke and imaginatively communicate a fundamental insight into the soteriological logic that is being played out on the Cross of Christ. They have the surgical precision and skill to expose a raw nerve in the body of atonement theology and are thus sensitive to the concerns of the day. As Gunton remarks, “all the main ways of spelling out the saving significance of the life death and resurrection of Jesus contain a considerable metaphorical and imaginative content, drawing, as is often remarked, from a number of human institutions: notably the legal system, the altar of sacrifice, the battlefield and the slave market.”⁹⁰ The moment in history in which these metaphors or models emerged becoming dominant, is a reflection of the socio-political concerns of the society at the time. There is then, a certain overlap or convergence of theological insight with the culture of the day and for this reason most metaphors are, to a greater or lesser degree, historically relative revealing in some instances as much about the community that coined them than it does about the Cross.

Charles Raven argued, “ransom made a great deal of sense to a slave group, who longed for nothing more than the day when they would be bought for a price and

⁹⁰ Gunton, 1988, 17.

released. A culture dominated by a belief in ethereal beings, both demonic and good, would welcome news of the conquest of the evil spirits, the ‘principalities and powers’ and the ‘spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places’ of which St Paul speaks in Eph 6.12.”⁹¹ This insight forged as it is in the *sitzem leben* of its day is later picked up, reappropriated and somewhat amplified, for example, by the writer Gustaf Aulen in his classic work *Christus Victor*, who demonstrated that one of the salient and original models that the Church preferred to use was one of *Victory*. Aulen himself writing in-between the Great War and the Second World War was himself caught up with the jingoistic military-style language that pervaded his day; as a result he himself could not remain unaffected by that linguistic atmosphere. Similarly, early Christianity itself did not emerge from a vacuum, and the nascent Church’s own developing identity would have been deeply impregnated with the religious and theological concerns that were germane to it then. Not only did the new Christian movement have its roots thrust deep in the Hebrew soil and practice but was also alert to, and presumably dialogued with, the religious customs and beliefs of the surrounding tribes and cultures. The language of *sacrifice* was thus part of the subconscious setting and heritage of the Christian splinter group from Judaism; early Christians would be familiar with the language of sacrifice from various cultic and liturgical settings. “A religious community brought up on the cultus of the old Israel would readily carry over the sacrificial concepts to the understanding of the death of Christ, reinforced as it was, with the description of Jesus as the Lamb of God.”⁹² It was only when the early church had its numbers swelled from neophytes that had absolutely no connection with Judaism, that the language of sacrifice became somewhat anachronistic and alien to them (unless they themselves converted from

⁹¹ McIntyre, 1992, 57.

⁹² Ibid., 58.

pagan and near eastern mystery religions that also utilised the concept of sacrifice in their own theological praxis).

Moreover, many converts to the Christian movement were slaves or ex-slaves from the Roman Empire, whose own experience would have made the pursuit of freedom a powerful crucible in which to forge new and virile metaphors. Consequently, *ransom* made a great deal of sense to a slave group, and was in all probability snatched directly from the market place. This model spoke evocatively to a suppressed remnant who longed for nothing more than the day when they would be bought for a price and released; yet this model has recently undergone a new lease of life (particularly in South America) where the gospel, hybridised with Marxist thought, has given an oppressed people a renewed sense of vision simply called *Liberation* Theology. Corrupt political structures and the phenomena of globalisation, coupled with rising oil and food prices, have meant that people are caught in a web of macro-economics that binds them as effectively as the old shackles of the slave. The cry of the poor has meant that the underdog of history will naturally gravitate to a theological model that speaks to them of salvation. In the medieval period, a mercantile or exchange model that came to the fore which reflected the social stratification of society at the time became the primary lens for which Christ's work on the Cross would be understood for that period. The hermeneutic here would be *Satisfaction* and would be developed brilliantly by Anslem of Canterbury.⁹³ Another competing model that emerged in that era centred on personal encouragement and transformation. It was developed by Peter Abelard but was also indirectly linked to the courtly love movement of the medieval

⁹³ "In feudal times. When duties had to be performed for the overlord, and reparation made for duties unfilled, 'satisfaction' inevitably chimed in with medieval social and economic thinking." Ibid., 58.

period; although not *initially* as successful, it is still probably one of the most compelling and universally acceptable models for all time.

However, it is important to state that most of these metaphors or models that have emerged from the historical and cultural setting of their day have a limitation in how they can be applied. Taken too literally they can be stretched and distorted to the point where their credibility to operate can become such a caricature that they metamorphose into something more like myth. “Metaphors are pressed too far when we expand or generalize their application. This happens, for instance, when we use the commercial metaphor of redemption (the freeing of slaves by means of payment) to argue that it is the Devil or God the Father who demands payment. Such generalising does not take into account the limited scope of the metaphor. Either way - whether by reductionism or generalization - we push the metaphor too far, and we fail to acknowledge humbly that our use of metaphor binds us to a limited perspective.”⁹⁴ Distorting metaphors by extending their meaning runs the danger of doing violence to their original intention. Metaphors may have a shelf-life but the best of those in atonement theology linger and remain with us as testimony of a conversation the Church had with the culture of its day. They provoke us and challenge us to find new ways of preaching the gospel by unpacking the saving reality of Jesus’ Passion, and for this reason will always remain part of the heritage of the Church’s tradition.

Naturally those who wish to dismiss atonement language as *mere* metaphors, words strutting their stuff on a contemporaneous stage, can all too easily deconstruct and

⁹⁴ Boersma, 107.

dismiss the language employed purely because it can be linked to a theological and cultural vogue.⁹⁵ This transmission of certain types of language within the tradition can be likened to a family that cherishes its own customs, memories and shared history. It will operate well when its own mental furniture is in place and although some items may eventually merge into the background and be forgotten, or even relegated to the attic as heirlooms, they still remain part of the cultural heritage. However, it should caution us to the fact that these metaphors do have their limitations. They might give us glimpses of intuition, like family portraits, reminding us of where we have come from, but they should not be enthroned as permanent and extant family members. Family albums change and are updated, it would be weird to have a long distant cousin exhumed and placed centre stage in the living room just because they were a sensation in their day. Family members are indeed indebted to those who have gone before but the next generation should feel no compulsion, either to be in competition, *or* to give them a significance they no longer deserve. For example, “this post-biblical history of the model *ransom* serves to illustrate an important point about how models are to be employed in soteriology; they are not to be implemented literally, as if they were ‘complete symbols’ of the death of Christ, but rather as ‘incomplete symbols’. They should not be isolated from one another or be in competition with each other.”⁹⁶

⁹⁵ “One is hard pressed to identify a ‘post-modern’ atonement theory. It is far easier to think of ways in which post modern thinkers seek to ‘deconstruct’ atonement theories. The post-modern hermeneutics of suspicion..... Deconstructors typically want to know whose interest a particular theory or practice serves.” Vanhoozer, cited in Hill, 369.

⁹⁶ McIntyre, 1992, 31.

Good metaphors have the capacity of transcendence

This brings us to the essential point to be made, and that is, all these models and metaphors should transport or transfer us *away* from themselves so as to induct us more fully into the greater reality (in which they are already steeped) in which they seek to communicate. “Metaphors are the vehicles of fresh insight and thus constitutive of our apprehension of truth; that symbols mediate the transcendent because they participate in what they symbolise, and that myths, which are archetypal stories studded with numinous symbols, embody a sacral narrative of human identity in the face of the divine reality.”⁹⁷ Metaphors should be able to discard the trappings of their own historical grandeur and specific cultural identity to reveal the basic truth they are nudging us towards; for “a line of demarcation should be drawn between ‘to use’ and ‘to be used’, lest we fall victim to metaphor, mistaking the mask for the face. In brief we must ‘expose’ metaphor, unmask it.”⁹⁸ In the realm of soteriology metaphors expose the saving significance of Christ on the Cross, which is one of healing alienation and the restoration of friendship both with God and with each other. The Cross is a gateway back into paradise and every atonement metaphor with great depth and inexhaustible reserve should strikingly point us to the eschatological reality that is opened up to us in the dynamic of the Cross. “The metaphors of atonement are ways of expressing the significance of what had happened and was happening. They therefore enable the Christian community to speak of God as he is found in concrete personal relationship with human beings and their world.”⁹⁹ The historical questions: why did Jesus die? How did Jesus view his own death? And what did he and his subsequent followers think he was accomplishing? are obviously questions of

⁹⁷ Avis, 11.

⁹⁸ Ricoeur, P. (2007), 298, citing Turbayne.

⁹⁹ Gunton, 1988, 46.

paramount concern and foundational to the study of atonement theology. N.T. Wright suggests that Jesus' own preferred *great metaphor* for interpreting the saving significance of his death, which he employed at the Last Supper, was not the Day of Atonement, but the Passover.¹⁰⁰ Green and Baker remind us that the function of salvation is one of healing, to restore and reconcile that which has been broken and should not be reducible or caricatured as some stock-exchange like transaction. "The purpose of forgiveness is the restoration of communion, the reconciliation of brokenness. The aim of forgiveness and justice alike is not to balance the books, as in a system of exchange that distributes punishment in accordance with the measure of guilt, on the contrary, their aim is personal communion. God's justice is 'Covenantal-relational' and is almost synonymous with faithfulness."¹⁰¹ It is essential, therefore, to be reminded of the salvation history of the people of God that is intimately linked to a covenantal setting.

The Covenant and the Passover

It seems self-evident that the context in which any atonement theology must be placed is first and foremost within the structure of *covenantal* relations. The Passover, therefore, is the primary and most primitive backdrop from which the saving work of Jesus and the Cross must be seen. This is the most basic contextual referent from which other metaphors have evolved. To do justice to the biblical data is to acknowledge that what Jesus was seeking to implement was not something foreign to the mind-set of Judaism but continuous and co-terminus with it. The relationship with God was first and foremost covenantal, not merely legal or transactional and this has

¹⁰⁰ Wright, N.T. (1996), *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 373.

¹⁰¹ Green, 147.

to be the underpinning rationale for interpreting the significance of Jesus' death. "God's covenant with Israel is not merely an abstract code; it is a concrete promise of love and faithfulness. The juridical conceptual system has never exhausted the meaning of the covenant. The covenant is *gift* before it is *law*."¹⁰² What is happening in the lead up and climax of Christ's death on the Cross is a restoration and preservation of right covenantal relations. For "Jesus' death on the Cross is a new exodus, a new Passover Supper, a new return from exile, an entry into a new kind of Promised Land, a building of a new and better temple."¹⁰³

Only when the linguistic atmosphere of the Passover is acknowledged and recognised for what it is, does it become clear that this is the fundamental hermeneutic of how Jesus interpreted his own mission.¹⁰⁴ The Last Supper was indeed a Passover meal¹⁰⁵ where Jesus and his disciples remember and evoke the Sinatic Covenant, where God's earlier deliverance from the bondage of Egypt is brought to life, relived and indeed made present. Exile was the punishment for Israel's disobedience, and restoration of the covenant meant ultimately homecoming and return to God's favour. Jesus' words during the Last Supper suggest that he substituted his own person and work for the temple and its sacrificial system. "This is my blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many",¹⁰⁶ conversely, his cleansing of the temple was a judgement on the futility of ritual sacrifices."¹⁰⁷ The metaphor or model of *sacrifice*, however, will be explored more rigorously and in greater detail in the following chapter. G. Ashby,

¹⁰² Vanhoozer, cited in Hill, 395.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 399.

¹⁰⁴ "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you that I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God." Luke 22:15-16.

¹⁰⁵ Christians looked upon the Christ event as a Passover event, "Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed", 1 Corinthians 5:7. The fact that the Passover was a sacrifice is seldom contested. Daly, Robert (1978), *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, Dalton, Longman & Todd, London, 38.

¹⁰⁶ Mark 14:24.

¹⁰⁷ Wright, 1996, 416-417.

however, goes so far as to refer to the Passover as *the missing link*. He elucidates how the origins of the Passover had its beginning in a desert people of nomads. It was a feast which the Hebrews had already observed before they arrived in Egypt as a result of being displaced through famine, known as a *Chag* or trek-feast referred to in Exodus 8:1. Unleavened bread and bitter herbs would be desert fare and took place at the spring full moon, before Bedouin would begin their trek to fresh pastures. "It is a sacrifice of nomad or semi-nomadic shepherds, offered for the good of the flock in spring - when goats and sheep drop their young and when the journeys to the summer pastures are undertaken. The blood smeared on the door posts and lintel would indicate an aversion sacrifice to deal with the desert djinns or with plagues."¹⁰⁸

The feast obviously evolved when the Hebrew tribe abandoned its nomadic wanderings and adopted a more fixed agrarian pattern, and when the construction of the Temple meant that the cultic life of the nation became centred in and around Jerusalem. However, the feast itself, with its roots in the agricultural fertility rites of a wandering tribe evocatively reminded them of the night the Hebrews won their freedom with the *passing over* of the angel of death. Exodus 12 and Deuteronomy 16:1ff connects it directly with saving history, and sees in its performance a concrete manifestation of Yahweh's redemptive action in history. Passover is the ultimate sacrifice which also powerfully calls to mind God's action for Israel at the Sea of Reeds when the encamped Hebrew's were caught, quite literally, between a rock and a hard place. Yet it remains a thoroughly historical sacrifice, a feast rooted not only in a cyclical fertility rite, but one which continues to remind the Jewish people both of the tears they shed as slaves under Pharaoh's taskmasters, and their subsequent escape

¹⁰⁸ Ashby, G. (1988), *Sacrifice, Its Nature and Purpose*, SCM Press, London, 70.

crossing a treacherous body of water and safe passage towards the Promised Land and liberation.¹⁰⁹ For celebrants of the Passover, these events were actualised and made present to them as if they were participants themselves, a true memorial or anamnesis, encapsulated in the Seder meal. For this reason, even in the Diaspora, celebrants can wistfully say “next year in Jerusalem, next year may all be free”, as a haunting reminder of their historical circumstance and quest for salvation through God’s direct intervention.

Christ’s blood, therefore, also has a dual role: it both cleanses (as in expiation) *and* averts spiritual death being reminiscent in a more potent fashion of the blood that was smeared on the door posts that protected the Hebrews against the angel of death, that passed over their houses on the night when the Passover meal was being celebrated. However, the blood is in essence linked with the ritual that is associated with covenant making. It re-establishes and restores the relationship between God and man. During this act of covenantal renewal Christ is seen as the liberator, typologically prefigured in Moses who frees them from slavery enabling them to enter into a renewed friendship with God. The whole trajectory of Jesus’ movement towards the Cross is thus intended to be one that connects with this event and remind those present of the rescue of the slaves from bondage from Egypt. Passover was *the* Festival of deliverance from Egypt and the most basic relationship Israel had with their God as liberator. Passover and Covenant are intimately connected, for the Passover is not only the exodus feast but also the Sinai feast. “Rescuing, liberating, renewing, recreating, sacrificing, expiating, cleansing. In other words they believed he was saying ‘I am Passover, I am Moses, and I am the God liberator. I am Aaron, I am

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., P73.

the Passover lamb.”¹¹⁰ Another typological twist is with the comparison of Jesus’ Cross with that of Moses holding aloft the bronze serpent in the desert. Moses holds high for all to see a prophylactic device given by God so that the people who were afflicted by snake bites could look upon the uplifted image and be healed. (John 3:14; Numbers 21:1-9). The Cross similarly counteracts the venom of the old vicious enemy of Christ who is depicted in the book of Revelation as “the great Dragon, the ancient serpent who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world,” (Revelation 12:9). The Cross and the death of Christ are thus interpreted in a medicinal way as a healing device provided by God as an antidote to the poisonous influence of the Devil.¹¹¹

However, without doubt the dominant theme that is being played out in the gospels is Christ as Passover, for Christ died and rose at Passover time and it is generally accepted that John’s chronology of events has Jesus’ own death coincide with the slaughtering of the Passover lambs at the Temple. The knives are quite literally being sharpened for the Passover lamb when Jesus meets his end. Although the disciples share a meal of unleavened bread the day before, the atmosphere is still redolent of Passover itself. The symbolism cannot be more graphic.¹¹² In the other gospel accounts¹¹³ Jesus and his disciples keep the Passover indicating that he saw himself as ushering in what the Passover effected. The Last Supper is, from first to last, a

¹¹⁰ Ashby, 80.

¹¹¹ Baxter, Christina (2004), *The Wounds of Jesus. A Meditation on the Crucified Saviour*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 99.

¹¹² “In John’s gospel, the Lord’s Supper (John 13:1ff) is not a Passover meal, it is antedated by 24 hrs, so that the connection with the Passover is not, as in the synoptics, that of the Lord’s Supper which was a Passover, but Christ is the perfect Paschal victim, crucified simultaneously with the sacrifice of the lambs in the temple.” Higgins, A. J. B. (1960), *The History of the Fourth Gospel*, Lutterworth Press, London, 77.

¹¹³ (Matt 26: 17-19, Mark 14: 12-16, Luke 22: 7-16).

Passover event from which immediately follows the Passion,¹¹⁴ beginning with the agony in the garden. There was a conscious and deliberate merging of salvation history, “today is the day of salvation”.¹¹⁵ Chronos and Kairos meet and the time is one of ripeness and fulfilment. The imagery of Jesus portrayed as a lamb is clearly meant to trigger in the collective and atavistic memory an intimate association with Passover and Covenant renewal.¹¹⁶

I have suggested here that the original backdrop to understanding the death of Jesus is Passover and the restoration of the Covenant. However, if this is the master key or primary hermeneutic that should be applied in the realm of soteriology it must be acknowledged that the language of atonement quickly shifts its ground and agenda in order to speak meaningfully to an increasingly non-Judaic audience. St Paul was writing to a people outside Palestine, Jews or Greeks who had never experienced sacrifice. So he uses language which has the flavour more of the law courts, juridical terms like *acquittal* or language more suited to commercial transactions like *penalty paid*. It is the idiom of the slave market where slaves receive their freedom but at a price paid and for a ransom traded. Behind this, however, Paul still retains the notion of entering into a covenant, as did the Israelites at Sinai, but now the language takes on a different nuance and emphasis more aptly suited to the Hellenistic world in which it has to function; but it is here, where the theological waters become murky, with the intrusion of newly forged metaphors that are at times dangerously taken out of context, or just taken more literally at face value than is prudent. For, “It was

¹¹⁴ “The sacrifice set deliberately at Passover time comprised within itself all the traditional sacrificial motives which had already clustered around the Jewish Passover, from creation through expiation, reconciliation covenant remaking and promise of future blessing.” Ashby, 100.

¹¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 6:2.

¹¹⁶ “The lamb of revelation is the same lamb as that of John 1:29 triumphantly acclaims as the messiah, the lamb is the Passover lamb and no other. To the crowd at Jordan, to the readers of the fourth gospel and even readers of the Apocalypse the most obvious of all slain lambs was the Passover lamb whose blood was poured at the altar foot as a sin offering whose feast meant, rescue, covenant, victory, care, creation and future glory for Israel.” Ashby, 87.

precisely at this point that the early Church Fathers lost the original background in Paul's thought and inserted instead a background of their own which St Paul had never intended to be there. They made it not a rescue operation, pure and simple, but a bargain driven with the devil - The devil that had played no part in the Exodus at all. In Exodus God had defeated Pharaoh - the Fathers had God driving a hard and somewhat immoral bargain with the devil; for his people."¹¹⁷

So as Christianity makes inroads into a new Hellenistic and later Latinised culture, the language and imagery adopted to shed light on the atonement became further removed from any Passover ritual or sacrificial system from which it originated. The language associated with transaction, redemption, ransom and later satisfaction (and ultimately with a legalistic twist) came to the fore, which in itself spawned questions of what was the exact nature of the exchange taking place on the Cross and to whom was the ransom being paid?¹¹⁸ This led to more exotic and extreme distortions of Jesus' death interpreted in vicarious and penal substitution phraseology. This development ostensibly preserved God's Justice at the expense of creating an anthropological caricature of God the Father as some sort of blood lusty potentate, where mercy and forgiveness retreat into the background. Christ may be the liberator being victorious over death but what was the objective mechanism being employed if it was not one still steeped in sacrifice,¹¹⁹ even in some remote sense. Before I examine the classic

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 57.

¹¹⁸ "The new set of images, borrowed from the law courts or from slave markets became the standard language of Atonement and instead of the original language of sacrifice and covenant, a language of acquittal of guilty defendants, or the paying of debts, or payment of feudal dues took place." Ashby, 64.

¹¹⁹ "Outward sacrifices, to be genuine, must be the expression of spiritual sacrifice. 'The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit...' The prophets of the Old Covenant denounced sacrifices that were not from the heart or not coupled with love of neighbour. Jesus recalls the words of the prophet Hosea; 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' The only perfect sacrifice is the one that Christ offered on the Cross as a total offering to the Father's love and for our salvation. By uniting ourselves with his sacrifice we can make our lives a sacrifice to God." Chapman, Geoffrey (1994), *Catechism of The Catholic Church*, London, 2100.

metaphors that were adopted by the early Fathers of the Church it will be necessary to excavate with greater clarity the exact nature of sacrifice itself. Jesus' death may have been a Passover event, and a new covenant, but it still drew heavily on the notion of sacrifice, for "Jesus did not condemn sacrifice; indeed he offered himself as a sacrifice, he is the paschal victim and his sacrifice is the sacrifice of the new covenant",¹²⁰ and it is exactly to the history and meaning of sacrifice, as a premiere model of the atonement, that we must now turn.

¹²⁰ De Vaux cited in Ashby, 100-101.

Chapter 2. The Enigma of Sacrifice

For many to approach the Cross of Christ is to approach someone engaged in the heroic and noble act of *sacrifice*. Christ nailed to the Cross is interpreted in the crudest way possible as an act where an innocent man suffers for the good of others, or at least for some metaphysical ideal. This secular usage, divorced from any ritual or cultic baggage, is bound up with the notion of a costly giving up¹²¹ and in this case it is to give up one's life for a greater cause; for others or more ambitiously for the whole world;¹²² for "greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."¹²³ This is not a difficult concept to grasp as it is linked to an act of generosity, or perhaps foolhardiness, by the immolated victim. This is as true for soldiers risking their lives in the heat of battle as it is for a parent devoting their life to the welfare of a child. The appellation *sacrifice* then has an immediate currency which has admittedly become cast away from its original religious moorings. Robert Daly goes as far to suggest that the "popular secular concept of sacrifice doesn't reflect the Old and New Testament usage, and therefore leads to massive distortions particularly in theories of the atonement."¹²⁴ However, the emotional charge that the word conveys is not necessarily all bad. Although the secular stress is on giving something up it can still evoke feelings of awe and admiration if it is an exchange for a greater good. Yet sacrifice is "not a mechanical economic transaction but an act which expresses the faith that a relationship is possible between offerer and the unseen receiver of sacrifices. In the action of sacrifice some changes occur in the object that

¹²¹ Williams, Rowan (1984), *Essays on Eucharistic Sacrifice in the Early Church*, Grove Books, Notts. U.K., 27

¹²² "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World." John 1:29.

¹²³ John 15:13.

¹²⁴ Daly, *The Origins of*, 2.

is sacrificed (victim) i.e. death. Yet sacrifice is not primarily a death rite.”¹²⁵ Although in popular parlance, when sacrifice is considered in a religious setting, it is often equated with the slaughter of a victim, and invariably involves a bloody sacrifice.¹²⁶ In fact according to F.C.N. Hicks: “The ‘man in the street’, and many who are more familiar with theology than he, would still, if they were asked to describe a sacrifice, suggest an altar, with a living victim bound upon it, and a priest standing over it with a knife in his uplifted hand.”¹²⁷

Sacrifice is a complex and fluid term difficult to navigate around but what is almost universally agreed upon is the basic definition that sacrifice comes from the latin *sacrificium* (*sacer*¹²⁸ and *facere*) which means to make holy or sacred.¹²⁹ The word originally implied an activity which involved making an offering to a god in order “to sanctify”, and for this reason it should be considered in its original context to be a term belonging to the world of cults, rituals and worship.¹³⁰ St Augustine establishes the point when he says that sacrifice is a “divine matter” even when performed by man, for its function is to unite human beings in a relationship of friendship so as to secure happiness. “Thus the true sacrifice is offered in every act which is designed to unite us to God in a holy fellowship, every act, that is, which is directed to that final

¹²⁵ Ashby, 8.

¹²⁶ Sykes, S.W. (1991), *Sacrifice and Redemption. Durham Essays in Theology*, Cambridge University Press, 9.

¹²⁷ McGuckian, Michael S.J. (1984), *The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. A Search for an Acceptable Notion of Sacrifice*, Gracewing, Herefordshire, England, 26.

¹²⁸ “There is much speculation about the etymology of *sacer*. Some would derive it from the Indo-European base *sak-*, ‘to sanctify, make a compact.’ The old Norse *sattr*, ‘reconciled,’ and the Hittite *saklis*, ‘law, ritual,’ are derived from this base and appear to be cognates of *sacer*.” Turner Victor (1992), *Blazing the Trail. Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbol*, The University of Arizona Press, Tuscan, 90.

¹²⁹ Moses, John (1992), *The Sacrifice of God. A Holistic Theory of Atonement*, The Canterbury Press, Norwich, 79.

¹³⁰ Young, Francis (1973), *Sacrifice and the Death of Christ*, SPCK, London, 12.

good which makes possible our true felicity.”¹³¹ Augustine also suggested in a practical way that “true sacrifices are acts of compassion.”¹³² At the turn of the twentieth century the French anthropologists Hurbert and Mauss defined sacrifice as: “A religious act which, through the consecration of a victim, modifies the condition of the moral person who accomplishes it or that of certain objects with which he is concerned.”¹³³ What is clear is that the religious activity of sacrifice, is an action designed to establish and transform one’s relationship, and in some cases, even one’s identity to the divine. Bivano suggests this by stating: “My working definition of sacrifice in its most general theistic sense is that sacrifice is an action that seeks to establish or transform one’s relationship with the divine, often with a material offering or visible ritual, whose goal is the transformation of one’s own religious identity.”¹³⁴ Bivano then concentrates on a more fundamental premise still by saying that “dedication” is the core meaning of sacrifice.¹³⁵

However one defines sacrifice, it can be construed as an action that seeks to achieve something at a profoundly metaphysical level, and for this reason can be interpreted as a grammar or “language of communication”¹³⁶ between the profane and sacred, a ladder linking earth to heaven.¹³⁷ It will often involve more than the offering of material things where sacrifice can be personally costly¹³⁸ involving the “dedication

¹³¹ Augustine, St (2006), *City of God*, Penguin Classics, London, 379 (Book X Chapter 6).

¹³² Ibid., 380.

¹³³ Hurbert, Henri and Mauss, Marcel (1964), *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, Cohen & West, London, 13.

¹³⁴ Bivano, Erin Lothes (2007), *The Paradox of Christian Sacrifice. The Loss of Self, The Gift of Self*, Then Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 14.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 193.

¹³⁶ Bradley, Ian (1995), *The Power of Sacrifice*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 37. See also Hurbert, 97.

¹³⁷ Dillistone (1968), cited in Bradley, 73.

¹³⁸ Moses, 70.

of the will” and “the gift of self”.¹³⁹ In most religious societies sacrifice was seen as efficacious and potent for it released power, the power of life itself as an enabling, integrating and life-giving energy.¹⁴⁰ In the Judaeo-Christian tradition which was originally centred on the cult and the maintenance of good covenantal relations, atonement was always something achieved at the initiative of God alone. It was God himself who provided the ritual tackle of sacrifice as a mechanism to affect expiation and reconciliation. Jesus’ life can thus be interpreted with sacrificial overtones where he willingly gives himself as a “dedicated self-gift”,¹⁴¹ to God in order to secure humanity’s salvation, which climaxes on the altar of the Cross.¹⁴² For this reason St Thomas Aquinas can succinctly summarise the passion of Christ as also being a true sacrifice and one motivated by the power of love. “This gesture, this voluntary enduring of the passion, motivated as it was by the greatest of love, pleased God. It is clear that Christ’s passion was a true sacrifice.”¹⁴³ It is because Jesus is the one and true mediator that he alone can reconcile humanity with God. His sacrifice on the Cross becomes supremely a “sacrifice of peace”¹⁴⁴ where “he himself might be both the one who offered and who was offered”,¹⁴⁵ both priest and victim.

The religious significance of the term, therefore, conveys a different twist or nuance from the secular usage. It is of a totally different calibre, being more connected with joy, festivity and thanksgiving,¹⁴⁶ with the emphasis linked more with the idea of

¹³⁹ Stone, Darwell (2006), *The Eucharistic Sacrifice*, Wipf & Stock, Eugene, Oregon, 8.

¹⁴⁰ Moses, 72, 76.

¹⁴¹ Biviano, 66.

¹⁴² Peter Lombard (*Sentences* IV, dist.12, cap. 5.) cited in McGuckian, 2.

¹⁴³ Aquinas, Thomas (1965), Edited by T. A. Murphy, *Summa Theologiae*, Volume 54. (3a. 46-52) *The Passion of Christ*, Blackfriars, London, (3a. 48, 3. was Christ’s passion effective as a sacrifice?), 81.

¹⁴⁴ “And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his Cross.” Colossians 1:20.

¹⁴⁵ Aquinas, 1965, 81.

¹⁴⁶ Daly, *The Origins of*, 3.

giving than giving up, where the giftedness¹⁴⁷ element comes to the fore. “The word never connoted reluctance or deprivation or renunciation or sadness or inevitability grimly accepted. Sacrifices were occasions of greatest joy and festivity and thanksgiving, and were gladly performed as expressions of the attitude of men to their gods. Sacrifices were always as large as possible; the larger they could be made, the greater would be the accompanying joy and festivity.”¹⁴⁸ It has to be said at the outset that theories of the atonement that focus on the suffering, death and destruction¹⁴⁹ of the victim is by and large without any scriptural foundation.¹⁵⁰ The most primitive application of the term in the history of Israel connects it to the wandering tribal customs of the desert nomads and also with the settled habits of an agricultural community. A nomad would naturally offer that which was of value and in this case it would be something directly from their flock, whether a goat or lamb.¹⁵¹ Many Jewish tribes, however, did not identify directly with these pre-settlement desert wanderers but were sedentary Canaanite tillers of the soil. They offered not from their flocks but from the fruits of the earth. These two strands are reflected in the gift homage ideas that are associated with the sacrifices of Cain and Abel,¹⁵² which emphasise the differences in agricultural practice and what they had access to of value. The motive that underlies each sacrificial action here is still one of gift,¹⁵³ where the “purpose of

¹⁴⁷ “The basic understanding of sacrifice in the Catholic tradition as a gift offered to God.” McGuckian, 79.

¹⁴⁸ Yerkes cited in Bynum, Caroline Walker (2007), *Wonderful Blood. Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 88.

¹⁴⁹ Although the cultural anthropologists Hurbert and Mauss concluded otherwise by their observation of religious societies: “Through this act of destruction the essential action of the sacrifice was accomplished. The victim was separated definitively from the profane world; it was *consecrated*, was *sacrificed*, in the etymological sense of the word and various languages gave the name *sanctification* to the act that brought that condition about.” Hurbert, 35.

¹⁵⁰ Daly, *The Origins of*, 3.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵² Genesis 4:3-7.

¹⁵³ Although it is clear from the Genesis text that Abel’s sacrifice is the one regarded as acceptable, an offering from his livestock and one that has the potential to generate blood. “In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock

sacrifice is benevolent, not destructive. Sacrifice is offered from the stuff of life closest to the offerer, their food, their livelihood”.¹⁵⁴

Scholars such as Ashby have alerted us to the fact that sacrifice in its original form is intrinsically wrapped up with the context of worship and the paraphernalia of ritual. “Sacrifice involves action, drama, ritual, and worship however rudimentary or sophisticated. It is not merely a technique. It is always understood as being effective at doing something and it is creative.”¹⁵⁵ Sacrifice, therefore, was a conscious act by a people to affect something, a manipulation of metaphysical reality or the supernatural realm. It would consist in its most basic form in making an offering to a god either to enter into communion with that god, or perhaps to avert danger and to soothe the deity’s anger. What is clear is that there is an implicit acceptance that some code or infraction had been trespassed which needed to be repaired. The sacrifice operates as a sort of fence-mending technique to ensure that any infringement of the relationship between god and the worshipper is restored and maintained. “Sacrifice is theologically interesting because it has to do with divine persons, not just with impersonal forces..... sacrifice, despite its crude origins, its notion of feeding the gods, provides an arena for theological reflection.”¹⁵⁶ Sacrifice, a phenomenon that has manifested itself in most cultures, is thus essentially to do with boundary maintenance and the restoring of relationships with the deity. It has a communal function between persons. “What is common to all sacrifice, no matter who practises it is action, action taking place between two partners, the one human the other superhuman. Sacrifice brings about a change and benefits the sacrificer. Sacrifice is,

and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.” Genesis 4: 3-5.

¹⁵⁴ Ashby, 10.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹⁵⁶ Finlan, Stephen (2005), *Problems with Atonement*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 19.

therefore, concerned with action in relationship with communication, with persons.”¹⁵⁷

In the ancient world the precise meaning of sacrifice is somewhat ambiguous, complex and fluid. Sacrifice itself had a broad application but what was germane to all sacrifices was that something was offered of value. “In the ancient world, sacrifice did not simply mean slaughter of animals. It covered all forms of offering to the gods like the first fruits of the harvest, wine, barley, flour and so on, though slain animals were usually regarded as richer and better offerings.”¹⁵⁸ In Greco-Roman religions people had a crude understanding of what they were affecting by offering sacrifice, but they knew they were affecting something; for “sacrifice is a practical system for improving the spiritual environment, originating in ancient assumptions about feeding and appeasing the god.”¹⁵⁹ The most generic form was the gift offering. Individuals or whole communities embarked in some kind of transaction where a gift essentially masked a bribe used to enlist the protection or favour of a particular deity. “Throughout the history of ancient Greece people regarded sacrifices as a means of ‘feeding’ the gods. The ordinary worshipper thought that the gods were dependent on sacrifices for their food. Sacrifices were thus a crude means of winning their favour, and were often understood as gifts offered more or less as a bribes.”¹⁶⁰ In some instances it highlights the extent to which there is a shared experience being undertaken in the banquet between the worshipper and their god. As well as supporting the idea of gift there is also the deeply satisfying idea that something has been done well, and a meal shared, on some mystical plateau. “Man, literally, and

¹⁵⁷ Ashby, 24.

¹⁵⁸ Young, 22.

¹⁵⁹ Finlan, 19.

¹⁶⁰ Young, 23.

God, figuratively, partakes of the same feast. Sacrifice is completed in feasting; far from being renunciatory, sacrifice is profoundly fulfilling.”¹⁶¹ So in other contexts, which were more upbeat and celebratory, religious ceremonies focused on communion with the god which was entered into by way of a feast. A meal was the central event in which the god was encountered and portions of the food offered on the altar. In these communion sacrifices “the god was present as a sort of head of the family where all feasted together and the worshippers praised the greatness of the god and thanked him for his protection and support.”¹⁶² In some instances the worshippers actually feasted or partook of the god himself and obviously echoes or vestiges of this can be seen evident in the Christian Eucharist, where early Christians were charged with the ghoulish practice of cannibalism or even feasting on corpses.

Aversion sacrifices, steeped more perhaps in superstitious practice, sought the need to find ways of finding some sort of spiritual detergent to dissuade or wipe away pollution and the contaminating influence of forces considered unclean. It meant that offerings were even made to evil spirits and ghosts of the dead, as is still the case in some African religions. The object of the offering was to keep them as far away as possible from the land of the living, in order to deflect their negative influence which was thought to cause disease, old age and death.¹⁶³ In the Temple this tactic of the diversion of death is most evident. Instead animals become the target for this death sentence that lingers inpalpably in the air, but after the destruction of the Temple the people themselves become the target as history has revealed. “In the Temple, the people are forgiven and protected. There, the death that everywhere else hovers over

¹⁶¹ Levering, Matthew (2005), *Sacrifice and Community. Jewish Offering and Christian Worship*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 65.

¹⁶² Young, 24.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 25.

them is diverted to animals, so that while the animals die, the people are strengthened by their proximity to God. But everywhere else, this diversion is not permitted. Everywhere else, and particularly when there is no Temple, the people become the sacrifice, as Jewish history has shown so many times.”¹⁶⁴ This need to seek purification and, in particular, the use of blood as some kind of holy disinfectant is most strongly pronounced in the Hebrew Day of Atonement with its allied rituals. It indicates an underlying sense of universal sin and unworthiness coupled with the need to seek cultic purity which was a major psychological and religious factor that inspired the need for sacrifice.¹⁶⁵

A common understanding in the ancient world and one which has given rise to distorted atonement theologies is where the deity is perceived in anthropological terms. Sacrifice became not just a trade-off to enlist the support of a local deity but more menacingly an attempt to buy off or ameliorate a god’s anger. Offering sacrifices here became a placation or propitiation, a sort of cosmic insurance policy in an attempt to keep the god happy. “This is what the term ‘propitiation’ means: appeasing and making peace with someone who is angry. Sacrificial ritual preserves this idea of the offering being persuasive or even coercive, but other ideas are added to the understanding of sacrifice. The food-offering gets described with the more dignified label of gift, thus emphasising respect and obeisance rather than manipulation.”¹⁶⁶ However, no matter what motive underlay the sacrifice, divine acceptance of the gift and ultimately forgiveness itself (of transgressions made) was

¹⁶⁴ Wyschogrod, cited in Levering, 41.

¹⁶⁵ “Universal sacrifice arose out of a universal sense of sin - a deep sense of estrangement from unseen powers - sacrifice offered to put things right. Man who is guilty offers an animal instead of himself estrangement changed to accord. Sin encompassed a variety of meanings from ritual and legal mistakes to moral lapses and serious rifts between God and man.” Ashby, 11.

¹⁶⁶ Finlan, 12.

purely the gift of God. No amount of manipulation or coercion could force God's arm. "Forgiveness is not to be identified with atonement, propitiation or expiation, for this was God's ultimate gift of personal favour."¹⁶⁷

However, it must be said that the rationale underpinning acts of sacrifice in the ancient world had several strands and cannot be oversimplified or reduced to one, even though the primary intention was to secure forgiveness and seek communion. Sacrifice in its complex and varied manifestations can briefly be summarised as follows: they are classified into a generic threefold aspect namely: gift sacrifices, propitiation or sin offerings and communion sacrifices.¹⁶⁸ Whatever the motive the intention was of practical concern and one designed to bring about the welfare of the community. "Sacrifice is fundamentally pragmatic in motivation, relating to issues of survival and well-being. In any culture, sacrificial techniques are based upon ancient metaphysical beliefs; with time, the ancient metaphysics are largely forgotten, but by then the ritual has attained such sanctity that it cannot be overthrown, though it can be changed. When changes are made in ritual, they come from spiritualizing reflection."¹⁶⁹ Sacrifice then has an interesting evolution and has not remained static. Although many of these strands were evident in the practice of ancient Israel itself, it will now be expedient to focus on cultic practice specific to Judaism, so as to understand the heritage which gave rise to the Cross of Christ being interpreted in sacrificial terms.

¹⁶⁷ Daly, Robert (1978), *Christian Sacrifice*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C., 44.

¹⁶⁸ Stone, 6.

¹⁶⁹ Finlan, 19.

Sacrifice in the Old Testament

Sacrifice in the Old Testament has a rich and complex variety of forms which falls into various categories, thus indicating the sheer variety of offerings and sacrifices that exist existed.¹⁷⁰ This suggests that you are not dealing with a simple rite but an interlocking and developing system.¹⁷¹ The classifications of sacrifice in this period, however, can conveniently be broken down into *Communion Sacrifices* (similar to those found in pagan religions) which involved feasting with the god, accompanied with offering praise and thanksgiving. *Gift Sacrifices* (or peace offerings) also found in pagan rites but in this context were essentially bribes whereas for the Hebrews it involved offerings purely of praise and tribute; after the exile priests offered a continual act of praise in the form of *Holocausts* which were burnt offerings by means of fire. Lastly there were the third type of sacrifice that dominated the Temple at the time of Christ known as *Sin Offerings* which were designed to ameliorate the all pervading need to maintain cultic purity, not only in and around the Temple daily, but also nationally on annual ceremonies of expiation¹⁷² so as to avert disaster. The prosperity of the nation depended on the removal of impurities and unintentional infringements of the law. Sin offerings were a God-given means of wiping away sin and any accidental infractions of the cult; they were not interpreted as human attempts to buy off the anger of God. Sin offerings can be further divided into subgroups of *Propitiatory* offerings (which were offered to placate an offended deity, where only traces remain in the Old Testament), *Aversion* sacrifices (designed to ward off the powers of evil, and again only traces survive in Judaism), and finally *Expiatory* sacrifices as God-given means of wiping away sin and removing pollution and were

¹⁷⁰ Young, 25.

¹⁷¹ Williams, Rowan, 6.

¹⁷² Hurbert, 26.

thoroughly Jewish in design.¹⁷³ There was perceived to be a ranking of importance over sacrifices where the holocaust was considered primary “because it was burnt entirely in honour of God and nothing of it was eaten. The second rank in order of holiness was held by the sin offering, eaten only by the priests at the entrance to the temple on the same day as it was sacrificed. The peace offerings in thanksgiving were in third place; they were eaten the same day, but anywhere in Jerusalem.”¹⁷⁴

Sacrifice has many levels of meaning yet it is fundamentally linked to an activity that is meant to restore good covenantal relations and the flow of propitious divine energy and activity. Sacrifice was meant to be costly, at times painful, but essentially was gift orientated and ubiquitous so as to keep open the divine means of communication as a guarantor of atonement. “Sacrifice is one very important means of restoring the flow. Metaphorically, it often literally involves a flow of blood or a flow of sacrificial smoke. It is a destruction of that part of the self which impedes the flow and an abandonment of the self to that which is greater than it, the total process of self and significant others in their living together. To give up is often painful. Here to give up in sacrifice is a necessary piece of social surgery. For the Invisibles the sacrifice would be a gift; for men, an atonement.”¹⁷⁵ Of equal significance to the blood sacrifices in the early Christian mindset was the offering of incense, which had by the time of the New Testament become one of the most prevalent sacrificial rites associated with the temple. Incense became a common feature of the cultic practice, so much so that it was prescriptively used on a daily basis to give homage to God.

¹⁷³ Young, 28-30.

¹⁷⁴ Lucien, Bernard cited in: Centre International d’Etudes Liturgiques (1997), *Altar and Sacrifice*, The Proceedings of the Third International Colloquium of Historical, Canonical, and Theological Studies of the Roman Liturgy. The Saint Austin Press, London, 44-45.

¹⁷⁵ Turner, 105.

According to the legislation of Exodus,¹⁷⁶ Incense was to be burned twice a day on the altar of incense, which stood inside the temple proper, in the Holy Place in front of the veil leading into the Holy of Holies. The connection of incense with prayer was intimately entwined with the ritual and liturgy associated with the sanctuary, a time where prayer could be seen to rise along with the worship of psalm singing.¹⁷⁷ Psalm 141, v 2 “Let my prayer be counted as incense before you and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice”, associates incense directly with the symbolism of prayers ascending to God, as it does in the New Testament Apocalypse.¹⁷⁸ This interpretation of the incense offering became a connecting link of significance and continuity in the later development of a more spiritualised idea of sacrifice in post Temple Judaism and early Christianity.

A paradigm shift during the time of transition between the Old and New Testaments resulted in greater importance being attributed to the right attitude or intention of the worshippers during any cultic act. This allied with notions of thanksgiving and praise, rather than just implementing the rubrics of the cult, underscored the reality that for sacrifice to work at all it has to be fundamentally acceptable to God. “Behind this idea is the conviction, particularly in oriental societies, that he who accepts a gift is in some way bound by ties of favour to the donor. The sweet smell of the sacrifice is not regarded as placating the anger of God at sin, but as a symbol of the pleasure of God in the due discharge of his services.”¹⁷⁹ Overlooking the anthropological overtones, what became important was not so much how something was done but whether it was carried out in a spirit of obedience to Yahweh. This in itself paved the way for the

¹⁷⁶ Exodus: 30:1-10.

¹⁷⁷ Daly, *Christian Sacrifice*, 68.

¹⁷⁸ Rev:5:8 & 8:1-4

¹⁷⁹ Daly, *Christian Sacrifice*, 74.

Law and acts of piety to occupy a more strategic position in late Judaism, even supplanting cultic sacrifice itself at a later date. “The cult had lost its supremacy well before the Christian era, cultic sacrifice had in fact, if not yet in the religious consciousness of the people, been reduced to a non-essential position in the religion of Judaism. This helped make it possible for Judaism to survive as easily as it did the destruction of its temple.”¹⁸⁰

Before considering the replacement of ritual altogether with its spiritualising and moralising trends, spurred on by the prophets who saw a pure heart as equal if not of primary importance, it is necessary to grasp just how malicious and damaging sin was considered to be in the cultic life of the nation. Impurity wasn’t just an inconvenience it had the potential to contaminate everything. “Impurity is taken quite literally, as a stain on the sacred installation and altars of the Temple needing to be removed. God will abandon the Temple if impurity is allowed to persist. Impurity stands for disorder, a kind of spiritual chaos; ritual restores purity that is order. Sacrificial ritual then is seen as protective, rather than propitiatory.”¹⁸¹ Sin had a kind of spiritual materialism attached to it where the stain literally needed to be cleansed and removed for it unleashed a force that defiled the sinner, the sanctuary and the land.¹⁸² Moreover, the sacrificial rituals preserved and guaranteed the viability of the covenant and the priests had a vital role in facilitating this to ensure that forgiveness was obtained. Without the priest there was no ritual and without ritual, no forgiveness. “The impurity that corrupted the temples had to be cleansed, or the god would depart from the temple. In this regard, Israel’s temple religion does not differ from that of

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 84.

¹⁸¹ Finlan, 12-13.

¹⁸² Sklar, Jay (2005), *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement. The Priestly Conceptions*, Sheffield Phoenix Press, University of Sheffield, 147.

Assyria, Babylon, or Canaan. This impurity was cleansed through the sacrificial cult and through expulsion rituals like the scapegoat rite”,¹⁸³ a rite which was of a different class and order altogether to that of sacrifice.

The covenantal relationship between Israel and God was a partnership but not one of equals. God was wholly other, transcendent, but paradoxically amongst them in the midst of the Temple and enthroned in the Holy of Holies. It was this holiness and separateness that led to awe and a sense of trepidation where one literally had to tread carefully in his presence. Only the High Priest himself was allowed into the Holy of Holies and that was only once a year on the great feast day of the Atonement. “As a sort of spiritual defence ritual needed to pay special attention to boundary maintenance, expressed in terms of purity, cleansing and separation. The priestly technology of cleansing and separation was a defence against intended or unintended provocation of the deity’s wrath.”¹⁸⁴ Sin was not a private affair it was a breach of covenantal etiquette resulting in a rupture in harmonious covenantal relations. Sin impacted in a real way by upsetting the stability and fabric of community life. It was tantamount to a psychic earthquake and had far reaching consequences.¹⁸⁵ It threatened the continued patronage of God and could alarmingly even result in God departing from the temple. Sin, therefore, had a pervasive influence and it could pollute the temple itself: “Sin is a miasma that is attracted to the sanctuary. Deliberate sin penetrates all the way to the Ark of the Covenant in the most holy place, and to its lid, the *kapporet*. Impurity must be cleansed, principally on Yom Kipper, the Day of

¹⁸³ Finlan, 5.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 14.

¹⁸⁵ “On the more universal level there was conceived to be an intensely close relationship between temple, land and people. The sins of the people contaminated the land they lived in especially the temple, the dwelling place of Yahweh...An atonement of the temple and altar carried with it a simultaneous atonement of the land and its people.” Daly, *Christian Sacrifice*, 99.

Atonement, with a series of purification offerings, other sacrifices, and the scapegoat ritual.”¹⁸⁶

Israel, therefore, had various strategies to cleanse and purify the temple and its environs, which almost bordered on an obsession. Any effective cleansing here would have a spiritual impact on Israel itself leading to prosperity and stability both in public and private life, and the only life force strong enough to affect this was blood, as the Levitical code stipulates.¹⁸⁷ Clearly it is God in his mercy and forethought that provides the means and method to mop up these infractions in covenantal relations; it is God, who initiates the removal of the very sin that corrupts human beings and disrupts covenantal relations, by providing the remedy in the form of sin offerings, the vital ingredient being blood and what it represents. “The Levitical texts do not treat the slaying of the animal as the crucial moment; they focus on the careful differentiation (using six different verbs) of pouring, daubing, draining, squeezing, sprinkling, or splashing the blood on the sacrificial altar, the incense altar, the temple curtain, or the mercy seat, depending on the different kinds of sin and the different people who sinned. This has nothing to do with punishing the animal but with the purifying power that lifeblood is thought to have. The animal is not killed in order to punish it but to get access to its blood.”¹⁸⁸ This notion that blood is such a potent life force capable of such mystical qualities is hard to grasp, even though it is obvious that any significant loss of blood can result in the loss of life itself. It may be the case that the life-force within blood can counteract the death-force or impurity that results from sin. For people of the ancient world it was a precious commodity, it was life itself,

¹⁸⁶ Finlan, 15-16.

¹⁸⁷ “For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life.” Leviticus 17:11.

¹⁸⁸ Finlan, 38.

once imprisoned but now released through death and the holiest thing they had access to. As Hicks puts it: “It is not the death that atones, but the life. The death is vital to the sacrifice, because it sets free the blood, which is the life. But the victim is, in a true sense, operative, not as dead, but as alive as it had been slain....[for] the death is only made effective when the work of the blood begins.”¹⁸⁹

What is clear is that it was the *life* of the sacrificed animal that was required during the priestly mediation and not its death; for the blood was not simply the vitalising principle when it pulsed throughout the animal, for it had an independent life of its own even when removed from the body.¹⁹⁰ For that reason it was sacred belonging to God and capable of such ritualistic power. “The central act involved the blood of the animal, poured out and smeared on the altar. For the Israelites, blood was the symbol of life - It was this life-bearing power of blood not the death of the animal - that resulted in a change (Lev 17:11). The life of the unblemished animal represented the power to restore the defective life of the sinner.”¹⁹¹ More poignantly still, the blood of animals acted as a replacement or substitute for the blood of the sinner. There was an obvious note of *exchange* where the blood or burnt offering acted as a proxy for the individual who had violated the law, or who indulged in acts of cultic impurity. “A person should realize that he has sinned against God with his body and his soul, and that *his* blood should really be spilled and *his* body burned, were it not for the loving kindness of the Creator, who took from him a substitute and a ransom, namely this offering, so that its blood should be in place of his blood, its life in place of his

¹⁸⁹ Cited in McGuckian, 98.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 97.

¹⁹¹ Schmiechen, Peter (2005), *Saving Power, Theories of Atonement and Forms of the Church*, Eermans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K., 22.

life.”¹⁹² Blood was also was connected to fertility and birth and thus had an aura and mystic of life attached to it, which in part explained the taboos and purity laws associated with blood in the Old Testament, especially those connected to menstrual blood.¹⁹³ Blood was a vital life principal that had a sacred power of its own. As the anthropologist Victor Turner observes: “It may be even thought to reanimate that which is dead while deanimating that which is alive. The fact that blood is present at birth as well as at slaughter gives bloody sacrifice a rebirth as well as a life-terminating quality.”¹⁹⁴

Because of blood’s sacral character it was used in ritual and cult as a powerful cleansing agent, specifically because of its life-enhancing qualities, although used in different measure depending on the severity of the offence. “Different levels of purification are spelled out in the Levitical texts for the handling of different levels of pollution. *Hatta’t* blood applied to the burnt offering altar purges pollution caused by the commoner’s involuntary sin; pollution caused by the high priest is cleansed by blood sprinkled before the curtain. Blood sprinkled on the *Kapporet*, or mercy seat, cleanses deliberate and wanton sin, and this can only be done once a year, on Yom Kipper.”¹⁹⁵ The essential point to grasp is that the Hebrew word for atonement *Kipper* actually means to cover, conceal or remove and something is lost in translation if this concept falls from view. “The word *hilasterion* appears in Romans 3:25 and 1 John 2:2 and 4:10 but the English translation is problematic; sometimes being rendered expiation or atonement. In the Septuagint *hilasterion* is used to refer to the lid of the Ark of the Covenant on the Day of Atonement, when it was covered with blood

¹⁹² Berman, Joshua, cited in Levering, 64.

¹⁹³ Leviticus, 12:1-8, 15:19-30, 20:18, Ezekiel 18:6, 36:16.

¹⁹⁴ Turner, 100.

¹⁹⁵ Finlan, 16.

(Exod.25:16). Such usage connects with the idea of atonement as covering of sin.”¹⁹⁶ Sin then is covered up by the life in the sacrifice and when this covering up has been achieved the barrier preventing good covenantal relations is also removed. Moreover, to translate the verb *Kipper* as *atonement*¹⁹⁷ or even more technically as *expiation* is to lose the full force of its intrinsic meaning. With regard to Christ on the Cross, it is not always the case that crucifixion brought on excessive blood loss that resulted in death. As inhabitants of the ancient world knew, crucifixion was not necessarily a bloody death as the victims more often or not died from suffocation.¹⁹⁸ However, for the early Fathers of the Church such as Tertullian blood and blood shed was crucial for salvation and he emphasised its positive effects: “cleansing, sealing, freeing, protecting, restoring, vivifying, inebriating, reinstating, redeeming.”¹⁹⁹

Moreover, the wounds of Christ were often depicted as doorways of access or places of refuge, a consolation rather than a violation as their penetration provided a means of entry into heaven and the reopening of the way to salvation.²⁰⁰ Christ’s blood was particularly efficacious, as demonstrated in the book of Revelation where the theme of washing in the blood of the lamb is uppermost, and so is the celebration of martyrdom where the garments of the martyrs, stained in their own hot blood, is then soaked and washed clean in Christ’s blood.²⁰¹ Only when it is fully appreciated that bloods prophylactic function is to cover sin, in order to cleanse and purify, can the pitfall be avoided that perceives blood being used as the raw material to appease a bloodthirsty

¹⁹⁶ Schmiechen, 24.

¹⁹⁷ “English *atonement* suggests reconciliation and making up for misdeed, not necessarily implying cult, but we should not forget that biblical atonement terms originated within a cultic arena.” Finlan, 5.

¹⁹⁸ Bynum, 1. See also Brown, Raymond E. (1994), *The Death of the Messiah. From Gethsemane to the Grave: A commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, Volume One & Two, Doubleday, New York, The Physiological Cause of the Death of Jesus, 1088-1092.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 213.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 14.

²⁰¹ Revelation 1:5; 5:12; 7:14; 12:11; 19:13.

deity through some brutal and juicy offering. However, the verb *Kipper*, can have another dimension included within it so as to capture the full weight of its meaning. Embedded within can be etymologically concealed the dual elements of both *cleanse* and *ransom*, and it is perhaps this that holds the fullest interpretation. “In sum, inadvertent sin and major impurity both require sacrifice for atonement. Since both inadvertent sin and major impurity endanger (requiring ransom) and pollute (requiring purgation), sacrificial atonement must both ransom and cleanse. The verb used to describe this dual event is the verb and the power of the rite to accomplish both is due to the lifeblood of the animal.”²⁰²

The Day of Atonement

For the Hebrews the highest feast day of the year was the Day of the Atonement, (Yom Kipper) this was the climax of the liturgical season resulting in the ratification of the covenant and the banishment of sin. Sacrifice was an inextricable part of the ceremony and it was the role of the King as representative of the nation to offer the sin sacrifice. When there was no king it fell to the High Priest (Aaron or his descendants) who offered the annual expiatory sacrifice.²⁰³ “The Sacrifice of Day of the Atonement (Yom kipper) is in effect two rites, the offering of an Ox by the high priest for his sins and for those of the priesthood, and the ceremony of the two goats, chosen for their roles by lot; the one an offering for the sin of the nation and the other let loose ‘for Azazel’, the wilderness demon with sin laid on its head by the laying on

²⁰² Sklar, 187.

²⁰³ “With the end of the monarchy and the rebuilding of the Temple, there grew up a temple priesthood, led by a monarchical high priest. Priests were not merely holy butchers they were guardians of the Covenant and its shrine.” Ashby, 39.

of hands²⁰⁴ and confession over it.”²⁰⁵ The second goat becomes a scapegoat, whose destination was the wilderness synonymous with death and the forces of anti-life; but the logic of the Scapegoat was of a totally different order from that of sacrifice, in fact it is not a sacrifice at all for it sheds no blood but becomes in effect a sin carrier. “Expulsion is the opposite of sacrifice in many ways; a curse-bearer is the opposite of a precious gift. Sacrifice is more theological, focused on a relationship to a deity, and communicated through obeisance and repentance, while scapegoat is more magical, retaining primitive ideas about the literal manipulation of metaphysical reality.”²⁰⁶

The scapegoat starts out pure but then has the sins of the nation transferred or transmitted onto it and as a result it becomes an object that is considered totally impure and unclean. In no way could its blood be used as some form of cleansing agent because it became a repository for all that is corrupt, a thing cursed, and sin-saturated blood could not cleanse a holy place. Finlan refers to this process of transfer as a “curse transmission ritual” and suggests that many cultures in the Far East used such expulsion rituals, either before battles or on high feast days to purge the nation of any defilement and disease that would militate against success. “The curse transmission ritual involves the expulsion of an evil, a disease, or curse from the community by transferring it to a victim that will act as a carrier, literally taking the evil *out* of the community.”²⁰⁷ The process involved the ritual selection, transference or investiture of sin and then separation and expulsion of the victim from the midst of the community transporting the contagion with them. It became a sort of *sin bin* or *sin porter* whose mere presence constituted a real threat. The cursed object as a result was ceremonially driven out of town or pushed over a cliff, but not before being roughly

²⁰⁴ Lev. 16:21.

²⁰⁵ Ashby, 39.

²⁰⁶ Finlan, 7.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 32.

treated and abused in a dramatic gesture of repulsion. This often resulted in some sort of mob frenzy where the goat's hair was pulled and it was spat upon as a thing of derision. It is clear that there is a fundamental distinction to be made between expulsion rituals and sacrifice.²⁰⁸ "A sacrificial animal is a gift; a curse transmission victim is a sin-carrier, not a gift (would one offer a gift to a wilderness demon?). The sacrificial animal remains pure; the scapegoat starts out pure, but is made utterly impure and does not rate as sacrifice. The sacrifice has its end in a solemn moment within the sanctuary, but the scapegoat meets its end in a frenzied mob action where it is driven out with wild abandon."²⁰⁹ What is clear is that Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross could not simultaneously be both a sin offering *and* a form of scapegoating, for this would be a logical contradiction, a mixing of two clearly distinct and mutually exclusive rites; unless there is the tacit collapsing and compression of multiple atonement metaphors onto the Cross of Jesus to underwrite its supremacy as God's preferred mechanism of salvation. Indeed, it is only the later Epistle of Barnabas, where the scapegoat becomes the type of Christ which increasingly becomes a more common motif in Christian literature, underscoring the ambiguous conflation of Christ's sacrifice being interpreted simultaneously as both expiation and as an aversion.²¹⁰ Thus highlighting the fact that "Sacrifice could serve two such contradictory aims that of inducing a state of sanctity and that of dispelling a state of sin."²¹¹

²⁰⁸ "But this practice retains continuity with the basic concept of cover/remove; the scapegoat removes the sins from the people, thereby allowing for purification. It must be noted that while sins are transferred to the scapegoat, the victim does not die vicariously for sinners; the death of the victim is not a substitute for a death penalty pronounced against the sinner." Schmiechen, 22.

²⁰⁹ Finlan, 37.

²¹⁰ Young, 66.

²¹¹ Hurbert, 58.

The Day of Atonement then had two rituals operating but both with the intention of seeking purification from sin and a ratification of the covenant. The sin offering involving blood only dealt with inadvertent or unwilling sins, however in the New Testament when Christ's death on the Cross is interpreted as a sin offering²¹² it is more comprehensive, conclusive and all-embracing in its efficacy. Paul in particular sees an interchange between the animal sacrificed with that of the sinner. The sacrificial victim for all intents and purposes becomes the substitute or representative of the sinner. When the victim dies the sin is also destroyed. "This process of destruction is speeded up in the case of Jesus, the representative man, the *hilasterion*, and destroys him.....If we have understood Paul's theology of sacrifice aright, the primary thought is the *destruction* of the malignant, poisonous organism of sin. Any thought of *punishment* is secondary."²¹³ However, although some wish to interpret Jesus' sacrifice as a substitutionary death,²¹⁴ what Jesus represents is humanity and dies for all (2 Cor. 5:14) "not *instead of men* but *as man*",²¹⁵ i.e. as representative man.²¹⁶ It is not so much the case of Jesus and the believer changing places in some forensic exchange, but rather Christ sharing our estrangement from God so that we might share his sonship. Morna Hooker elucidates this when commenting on salient Pauline texts: "'Christ became what we are in order that we might become what he is.' Death, life; curse, blessing; law, liberty; slavery, sonship; sin, righteousness; riches, poverty. These bold sentences express Paul's conviction that Christ shares

²¹² McGuckian, 86, (See: Romans 8:3; 2 Corinthians 5:14; 5:21; Colossians 1:20; 1 John 1:7).

²¹³ Dunn, J.D.G. *Paul's Understanding of The Death of Christ* in: Sykes, 50.

²¹⁴ For example Karl Barth says: "It is the Judge who in this passion takes the place of those who ought to be judged, who in this passion allows Himself to be judged in their place." Barth, Karl (2004), *Church Dogmatics. IV.1 The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, T&T Clark International, London / New York, 246. John Stott also recasts this self-substitution position of God when he says: "Substitution is not a 'theory of the atonement'. Nor is it even an additional image to take its place as an option alongside the others. It is rather the essence of each image and the heart of the atonement itself." Stott, 236.

²¹⁵ Dunn cited in Sykes, 51.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

fully in the human situation in order that, *in him*, we may share in his.”²¹⁷ Christians thus participate in his sacrificial death through baptism so as to share in the new creation of the resurrection.

However, Christ’s sacrifice was understood firstly in the biblical sense as expiatory²¹⁸ and blood was used to purify and then facilitate reconciliation. It was also used to seal and restore the covenant, both old and new.²¹⁹ What was desired was to unite Israel with their God, to affect communion at any cost and the way to achieve this was with the sin offering with its use of blood, for blood joins or unites the two parties as well as cleansing, it produces a pact of friendship, it endorses a contract, and the two become one. Indeed it is often graphically referred to as cutting a covenant often by using an animal as a substitute although it is the bloodshed of circumcision that quintessentially seals God’s covenant with his people (Genesis 17:9-14). Admittedly, there is a rejection of human sacrifice in the Old Testament, although there is some evidence to suggest that there lingers the ghost of child sacrifice which comes to light in the sacrifice of Isaac.²²⁰ The Akedah²²¹ the story of the near-sacrifice of Isaac, demonstrates that blood of the cultic animal substitutes for the life of the community. The Akedah is interesting because it uncovers the primitive notion that sacrifice is an offering to God yet exposes the paradox of faith, or as Kierkegaard would say a

²¹⁷ Hooker, 35.

²¹⁸ Young, 82.

²¹⁹ Exodus 24:5-8, Mark 14:22-24, Matthew 26:27-29, Luke 20:22.

²²⁰ “Nothing in Gen. 22:1-19 suggests that God’s command to immolate Isaac was improper. In this view, the text in Genesis 22 belongs to a period in Israel’s history in which child sacrifice, although certainly not the cultic norm, could still be employed in certain serious situations in preference to animal sacrifice. ‘You shall give Me the first-born among your sons’ (Exod: 22:28).” Levenson, cited in Levering, 33.

²²¹ “The Akedah, the story of the near-sacrifice of Isaac and its redirection at the last moment by the substitution of ram, tells us something about the Hebrew rejection of human sacrifice. It is impossible to know how widespread child sacrifice was, but it looms in so many biblical passages that it is hard to deny its existence.” Finlan, 21.

“teleological suspension of the ethical”,²²² where murder is translated into a holy act. Yet it depicts the necessity that communion is only possible through a radical act of sacrifice.²²³ The paradox lies in the fact that life is made manifest by death, for what looks like a death rite is in fact an induction into the fullness of life. Blood symbolically representing the power of life is offered and given up, transporting both victim and sacrificer into the realm of the sacred and eternal present. “The paradoxical assertion that life lies in, is made present by, is given by, death was never rejected. Blood encapsulated, represented, asserted, enacted it - blood shed and living, drops and flow, moment and eternity, violation and salvation.”²²⁴ It is this life-surrendering as well as life-giving aspect of sacrifice that comes clearly into focus, yet God himself provides the means and method of sacrifice. So when Isaac asks Abraham where is the victim for the holocaust? the reply given is: “God will provide a victim for the holocaust.”²²⁵ Similarly this antitype is picked up in the New Testament parallel when Paul says: “God did not spare his own Son but delivered him up for all of us.”²²⁶

Rabbinic interpretations on the text that relates to the Akedah are numerous, but there is a suggestion that Abraham is in this position, in the first instance, as a result of the jealousy the angels have over humanity’s special relationship with God. As a result they make accusations against Abraham, the strongest of which is his initial failure to provide a thanksgiving sacrifice to God at the birth of his son Isaac.²²⁷ Commentaries on the text also suggests that Isaac was fully grown and as Abraham was an old man he asks his father to bind him first, thus demonstrating his complicity and willingness

²²² Kierkegaard, Soren (1985), *Fear and Trembling*, Penguin Books, London, 65.

²²³ Levering, 30.

²²⁴ Bynum, 255.

²²⁵ Genesis 22:7.

²²⁶ Romans 8:32.

²²⁷ Kessler, Edward (2004), *Bound by the Bible. Jews, Christians and the Sacrifice of Isaac*, Cambridge University Press, 41.

to be the sacrificial victim.²²⁸ According to Kessler the Rabbis go as far to suggest that Isaac's blood is actually spilt drawing attention to the fact that Isaac should be fit for sacrifice and even freely carrying the wood that is required for the holocaust cut by Abraham.²²⁹ Thus the binding and sacrifice of Isaac is a forerunner or pale imitation of what is to be completed by Christ; for another interpretation in the rabbinic tradition is that the ram in the Genesis pericope is no longer a substitute for Isaac but is transformed into Isaac himself, and thus Isaac becomes the sacrificial lamb, and to all intents and purposes, it is considered as if he had been sacrificed.²³⁰ The gospel parallels were accentuated in the patristic era underscoring that the wood that Isaac carried for sacrifice was a prototype for Jesus carrying the wood of the Cross,²³¹ where like Isaac he is bound in the Passion²³² and the identification with Jesus as the ram is most strong in the gospel of John when the Baptist says: "Behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world."²³³ This typological prefiguring became part of Christian folklore when it was also contrived that the mountain on which Isaac was sacrificed was the same one on which Calvary was centred.²³⁴

The atmosphere or backdrop for both was a covenantal setting where blood binds both parties. In lavish abundance the sacrificial phraseology of the Old Testament is applied to Christ. The rich sacrificial language that is studded throughout the Old Testament is now copiously applied anew to Him because the death of Christ draws to

²²⁸ Kessler, 125.

²²⁹ For example, one interpretation explains that when Abraham cut wood for the sacrifice he deliberately chose fig and palm trees for the burnt offering because they were halakhically suitable for sacrifice in the Temple, Kessler, 127.

²³⁰ Ibid., 145, 181.

²³¹ John 19:17.

²³² John 18:12.

²³³ John 1:29.

²³⁴ Gellman, Jerome I. (2003), *Abraham! Abraham! Kierkegaard and the Hasidim on the Binding of Isaac*, Ashgate, Burlington VT, 45-47.

itself all that sacrificial imagery associated with the atonement.²³⁵ “He is the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). He is our Passover (1 Cor.5:7). He is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:2, 4:10). ‘He gave Himself on our behalf an offering and a sacrifice to God of an odour of a sweet smell’ (Eph 5:2). He made peace through the blood of His Cross (Col. 1:20); and His blood cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7).”²³⁶ Sacrifice, then, was the most solemn binding of the covenant both in the Old and New Testaments; it removed danger, cleansed sin and restored Israel and the people of God to right relationship. It brought life, joy, liberation and peace. “For Sacrifice is neither liturgically or theologically expiation alone; it leads to reconciliation. Cleansing sin and making further communication possible; the purpose is communion. The community feast is a time for serving and meeting God.”²³⁷ In fact, not to be in covenant and right relationship is to court alienation, exile and death. Yet the forgiveness that is transmitted through any atonement ritual is always and at every time the gift and initiative of God, where it is always God who supplies the means of expiation through the mechanism of sacrifice. Ultimately the Cross is the supreme act of sacrifice because “the Cross is understood as Christ’s offering of himself to the Father, and his offering is understood to be made effective by his death. He is the Priest and the Victim.”²³⁸

Sacrifice shifts its ground; there is a fundamental seismic shift with the sacking of the Temple in Jerusalem AD 70 which effectively brings a halt to the sacrificial system. Yet embedded within Judaism it is a polemic and dialectic which effectively allows for the transition and survival of sacrifice in another form. The parts of Hebrew

²³⁵ Williams, Rowan, 7.

²³⁶ Stone, 8.

²³⁷ Ashby, 36.

²³⁸ McGuckian, 26.

literature most closely associated with the daily cultic life of the Temple were the psalms that accompanied worship. These ironically represented an alternative and opposing strand of tradition to sacrifice. The psalmody that accompanied the processions in the Temple richly celebrated the fact that prayer, praise and repentance were of a more authentic and vital concern than the trappings of the cult. The psalmody in the midst of the Temple provided a necessary corrective to the mechanical following of the rubrics of sacrificial worship alone.²³⁹ To a certain extent Israel's rabbis accepted the destruction of the Temple because they knew that the sacrificial liturgy was not ended, but rather would continue, quite literally, in Israel's life and flesh.²⁴⁰ The prophets had always been critical of a mindless non-reflective application of ritual which failed to take into account the spirit in which sacrifice was meant to be undertaken. More important still was the motive of the offerer and their purity of heart. Corruption and double standards were castigated in their rhetoric. If the cult was used in a spirit of hypocrisy and in a mechanistic way it was denounced. "Prophets stressed that the sacrificial system was useless without moral virtues, they insisted on the superiority of justice, mercy and love to all forms of material offering."²⁴¹ This moralising influence of the prophets acted as a corrective to abuses, where the wisdom literature, the law and the psalms testify to this end.²⁴² The whole thrust of their rebuke was to reform and correct the abuses, not to abolish sacrifice altogether. However, with the end of the Temple and the destruction of its ritual tackle, sacrifice as a phenomenon had abruptly ground to a halt. Yet, within the tradition, starting with the polemic of the prophets, lay dormant the seeds of its own

²³⁹ Young, 33.

²⁴⁰ Levering, 41.

²⁴¹ Young, 330.

²⁴² "To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice." (Proverbs 21:3). "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all that is in it is mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" (Ps 50:12-13). "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice." (Hos 6:6).

recovery but this time in a far more spiritualized form. The rabbis were able to preserve the Jewish religion by drawing on their own heritage. Rabbi Joshua felt moved to lament: “‘Woe to us for the place where the sins of Israel were expiated is destroyed’, but Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai was able to reply: ‘We still have a means of expiations of equal value - the practice of kindness, for it is said I will have kindness not offering.’”²⁴³

Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai also taught that: “prayer, charity and penitence take predominance instead of sacrifice”, and it was from the excavation of this tradition and the utilising of prophetic texts and the psalms that gave legitimacy to replacing physical sacrifice with a sacrifice of a pure heart. Acts of charity, prayer, fasting and a broken and contrite spirit became of equal value. Indeed Christianity itself emerged from the rabbinic strand of Judaism rather than the cultic, and by allowing the dominance of law above ritual it easily gave way to the spiritualising of sacrifice. “Prayer and virtue rather than sacrifice became a meaningful offering to God. The synagogues had prepared the way for the survival of Judaism after the destruction of their central religious shrine. The long-standing tradition that morality was more important than sacrifice, was to become extremely important to early Christianity as a spiritualizing of sacrifice.”²⁴⁴ There was thus an emergence of a clear tradition which delighted in the abolition of blood sacrifice, itself facilitated by the demolition of the Temple in AD 70. This supplanting of the ritual associated with the Temple, and the slaughterhouses of its precincts, with the more contemplative form of prayer and ethical observance, inevitably came to be seen as a more preferable and purer way of

²⁴³ Young, 34.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 35.

communion with God. It was essentially “a service from the heart” rather than being something reliant on the cultic priesthood and their bloodbaths.²⁴⁵

Prayer and thanksgiving – the spiritualization of sacrifice

For Christians, the rejection of pagan sacrifice had always been a priority, they had declined food offered to idols being sold in the market place, they had even resisted the burning of incense to pay homage and allegiance to the emperors, so keen were they not to compromise and offer sacrifice that they actually became despised and mistrusted for their alleged atheism which left them open to attack and persecution.²⁴⁶ However, sacrifice in its primitive form began to decline, for “the Greek and Roman, public sacrifices had long since become discredited in the eyes of intelligent people, while Hebrew sacrifices belonged to the past. With the Jerusalem Temple destroyed, never to be rebuilt, and even Passover, minus its lamb looked more like a banquet than a sacrifice.”²⁴⁷ The way forward for Christianity was to emphasise that the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, in effect a life of prayer, was considered to be an equally acceptable sacrifice to God. The life-style of the Christian had sufficient asceticism built within it for it to be considered a sacrifice in its own right. Indeed St Paul encouraged Christians to offer spiritual sacrifices²⁴⁸ and to be built up into a spiritual house, the new Temple. Late Judaism was able to adapt to the new situation without the Temple and early Christianity, from which it emerged, was a logical continuum of this process. “In summary, spiritualization describes the transformation and eventual abandonment of sacrifice, through substitution, moralizing,

²⁴⁵ Wyschogrod, cited in Levering, 42.

²⁴⁶ Young, 10.

²⁴⁷ Ashby, 116.

²⁴⁸ 1 Peter 2:5.

interiorization, metaphor, rejectionsism, and philosophic reflection that shifts the focus of religion toward spiritual transformation.”²⁴⁹

However, this was not the only development that could be brought to bear in unravelling the enigmatic knot of sacrifice. Martyrdom itself was a hermeneutical device for shedding light on sacrifice. A heroic death could operate as a substitute for sacrifice where suffering could potentially atone for sins in a vicarious fashion. This development was a tradition that was already emerging within Judaism. “When late in the Old Testament period belief in the resurrection of the dead began to spread, the primitive idea that suffering and death is a punishment was broadened to include the idea that by suffering one could atone for his own sins. Then faced with the enigma of the suffering of the just, the idea of the just man atoning vicariously for Israel became common.”²⁵⁰ However, this belief was unlikely to precede pre-Christian Judaism, and although the classic text on vicarious suffering is utilised from Isaiah 53:5-12 and especially 53:12: “he bore the sins of many”; it is in fact a unique text which stands alone. However, Christians cashed in on this text, bolstering their interpretation of martyrdom, whilst Judaism often avoided commenting on it.²⁵¹ Later, under pressure from anti-Christian controversies rabbis often interpreted the death of Moses and the Akedah as having actual atoning value. Interestingly, “whatever soteriological significance was claimed by the Christians for Jesus Christ, the Jews tended to claim for Moses and Isaac.”²⁵²

²⁴⁹ Finlan, 28-29.

²⁵⁰ Daly, *Christian Sacrifice*, 123.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 124.

²⁵² Ibid., 123.

In fact it was the Maccabean martyr theology which proved the richest seam to quarry from pre-Christian sources for the idea of a vicarious death.²⁵³ “The tradition that a martyr’s death could expiate sin was the earliest positive means of understanding the death of Christ. The martyr saw himself as participating in the atoning sacrificial work of Christ.”²⁵⁴ Judaism, however, was far more reluctant with the idea, whilst the early Christian Church embraced it with relish. The concept of self-surrender was an emotive submerging of oneself into the life-enhancing power of God, where one’s death blends and is subsumed into a vital communion with the living God. “Communion with God is not only life-giving; it is also life-taking, since our lives are owed to God, as expressed by Israel’s sacrificial laws. Authentic communion with God will include this life-surrendering aspect, because in surrendering ourselves to God we receive his life-giving power, rather than our insubstantial claims to autonomy, as the basis of our lives. In the ‘terrible danger’ of sacrifice, dying to ourselves, we live in communion with God.”²⁵⁵ This idea of immolation and offering oneself up was reinforced with symbolism connecting Christ’s death to the Pasch or Passover. Reference was made to the way the Passover lamb was prepared with it being placed on the spit in a cruciform fashion and, the hyssop being evocative of the blood daubed on the lintel of the door posts at Passover.²⁵⁶ Christ’s death was thus most definitely seen in the context of Passover, which did not have any notions of penal satisfaction attached to it, ideas quite foreign to the Old Testament. Yet, “it can be affirmed without hesitation that the idea of vicarious substitution is indeed one of

²⁵³ “I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our Father’s, appealing to God to show mercy, soon to our nation and by afflictions and plagues to make you confer that he alone is God, and through me and my brothers to bring to an end to the wrath of the almighty which has justly fallen on our whole nation.” 2 Maccabees 7:37 ff.

²⁵⁴ Young, 52.

²⁵⁵ Levering, 45-46.

²⁵⁶ Daly, *Christian Sacrifice*, 206-207.

the many ideas that grew up around the Old Testament Pasch. It provided the natural background for the New Testament idea of Christ's vicarious sacrificial death."²⁵⁷

This in itself merged with the other atonement tributary of Jesus' death being interpreted as a sin offering which meant the coalition of the two most powerful rites associated with atonement. "It illustrates the conviction of the early Church that the Old Testament especially its soteriological institution was both fulfilled and superseded in the person of Jesus Christ. For the Passover and the sin offering were the two rites which the Jews of New Testament times associated most closely with redemption and forgiveness."²⁵⁸ Christ's death on the Cross, in this context, can legitimately be seen as a sacrifice;²⁵⁹ where his death or rather offering of his life back to the Father was interpreted by the merging of these various soteriological currents. The sacrifice of the Cross is the fulfilment of the two national sacrifices of Israel, the Passover and the sin offering in the Day of Atonement.²⁶⁰ The combination of Passover with the Day of Atonement then allied with the vicarious death of a martyr (and the potency of Jesus' blood through his divine nature) had far greater efficacy than all the preceding sacrifices of the Old Testament put together. What is important to note is the sheer complexity of Sacrifice as a concept. The various strands that form an outcrop at various points in Israel's cultic history, and then again in the New Testament strata, are compressed together to produce the richest of all seams which are directed to worship and the removal of that which impedes communion. "The full context of sacrifice, in other words, envisions expiation, purification, restitution, complete self-gift, and thankful communion. In and through this regular and multi-

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 205.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 240.

²⁵⁹ "Our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed." 1 Cor. 5:7.

²⁶⁰ McGuckian, 102.

faceted sacrificial liturgy, the communion of God's people with God is liturgically attained in a mode that takes sin seriously and that has, at its core, dispossessive thanksgiving to the Creator."²⁶¹

The only New Testament book that deals with the subject of sacrifice directly is the Letter to the Hebrews and the whole thrust of this document is to say that all sacrifices have been summed up and superseded by Christ. *Hebrews* portrays Jesus as the High Priest who also offers himself as a sacrifice, replicating in himself the basic requirements of sacrifice and acting as a means of purification and entering the heavenly sanctuary with his own blood²⁶² which is infinitely more effective and life giving. Yet on this occasion he also surpasses and perfects the Old Testament criteria offering a once and for all sacrifice, thereby effectively abolishing the old system.²⁶³ The drama of Jesus' sacrifice is played out in the familiar theatre of the Jewish ritual system, but one which reaches its climax and definitive conclusion in his death, where a new covenant is established by building on the foundations of the old.²⁶⁴ Yet, "there is no indication in the letter that suffering is an end in itself, or that God demands suffering or death in payment for sin. *Hebrews* remains within the general boundaries of our review of Old Testament practices, i.e. sacrifice relates to purification for sin and is not a payment to appease."²⁶⁵ It is interesting to note that *Hebrews* repeats the rabbinic formula that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."²⁶⁶ What *Hebrews* teaches is precisely the eternity of the sacrifice,²⁶⁷ its once

²⁶¹ Levering, 65.

²⁶² Hebrews 9:12

²⁶³ Hebrews 7:27; 9:25:10:10. See Schmiechen, 33.

²⁶⁴ The Epistle to the Hebrews' author draws a typological parallel between the covenant sacrifice on mount Sinai and the sacrifice of Christ (Heb 9:18-21).

²⁶⁵ Schmiechen, 31.

²⁶⁶ Hebrews 9:22.

²⁶⁷ McGuckian, 97.

and for all character without its need to be repeated. For Christ's death was the fulfilment of all the expiatory rites of the Old Testament his blood the ultimate means of purification.²⁶⁸ The notion of the continuing sacrifice of Christ is encompassed through his priestly and ongoing intercessory role in heaven.²⁶⁹ Jesus gives his life in a spirit of loving obedience to his Father which elevates it to the level of atoning significance. If Jesus had met his end in a more conventional way by dying quietly in his bed or through a tragic accident, his death would not have had such redemptive force. Thomas Aquinas declares God can be propitiated only by an offering of homage that is due to God. His sacrifice is received by God as sufficient for the sins of the world because it is offered in pure love and obedience by the divine/human agent of salvation; because Jesus is human, he can give his life; because he is divine, his sacrifice is sufficient for all.²⁷⁰ Although "on the part of those who put Christ to death, the passion was a crime; on the part of Christ, who suffered out of love, it was a sacrifice. And that is why Christ himself is said to have offered this sacrifice and not those who slew him."²⁷¹

Hebrews takes for granted the knowledge of the sacrificial system which would have been familiar to Jewish converts. Yet as Christianity fanned out through the empire colliding with gentile cultures this connection is lost. It is here that alternative strategies and metaphors for understanding the significance of the Cross are imported, which later develop in some instances into full blown penal substitutionary theories. "The early church once cut off from its Jewish roots lost the Jewish outlook and presuppositions and very naturally pagan ideas and explanations were imported into

²⁶⁸ Young, 70.

²⁶⁹ Hebrews 7:25, 8:1-6.

²⁷⁰ Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 243-246.

²⁷¹ Aquinas, Thomas (1964) (article 3a. 48,3) 83.

the interpretation. Ideas of ‘propitiation’ or placating of God’s anger were introduced to explain how Christ’s sacrifice dealt with sin.²⁷² However blood atones because of the life it contains²⁷³ and the verb *kipper* (to atone) has the nuanced interpretation of to cover or expiate (perhaps connected to the Arabic *Kafara*)²⁷⁴ to dedicate one’s life (as a sort of physical prayer,²⁷⁵ or gift²⁷⁶) and also ransom.²⁷⁷ The whole pattern and texture of Jesus’ life was sacrificial. A life that demonstratively radiated divine love, which climaxed in the self-gift of himself to his Father for his brethren, thereby underscoring the pattern of life that should be adopted by the disciple. “By this we know love that he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our life for our brethren”.²⁷⁸ For the sacrifice of Christ is more than an atoning sacrifice, it was a sacrifice of worship and obedience²⁷⁹ that reflected the very principal which is present at the very heart and centre of the life of the Trinity.²⁸⁰ For “the sacrifice of the Son presupposes the co-sacrificial love of the entire Holy Trinity”,²⁸¹ where there is the perpetual perichoresis of mutual self-gift of fertile love that eternally flows between each member of the Godhead.²⁸² It can thus be construed that God, who is revealed in Christ, is continually sacrificing himself in the kenotic act of creation and the work of redemption through his Son.²⁸³ Yet it was the two ancient Jewish feasts, the Passover and the Day of Atonement and their merger in the early soteriological mindset of early Christianity that had served so well in interpreting the death of

²⁷² Young, 73.

²⁷³ Sklar, 173.

²⁷⁴ Sklar, 2

²⁷⁵ Williams, Rowan, 5.

²⁷⁶ Bynum, 212.

²⁷⁷ Sklar, 2.

²⁷⁸ 1 John 3:16.

²⁷⁹ Young, 95.

²⁸⁰ Bradley, 6.

²⁸¹ Bulgakov, Sergius (2008), *The Lamb of God*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 354.

²⁸² “So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” 1 John 4:16.

²⁸³ Bradley, 11.

Christ. “The meaning predominant in both was that of an aversion sacrifice, the removal of sin, protection from sin, death and the Devil, the escape from slavery to sin and the powers of evil.”²⁸⁴ The author of the *Hebrews* also picks up this motif of defeat of death and the Devil, but not through some transaction, payment, or ransom but by defeat through victory. “Since therefore the children share in the flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the Devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.”²⁸⁵ Indeed, it is the Fathers of the Church who subsequently makes theological raids on such imagery that results in the Devil being perceived in more mythological terms and of holding humankind to ransom; and it is to the theme of victory over death and the Devil, rather than sacrifice that we must now turn, particularly as we have just ascertained that the verb *Kipper* (atonement) can also communicate the lexical thrust of ransom as well expiate.

²⁸⁴ Young, 68.

²⁸⁵ Hebrews 2:14-15, see Schmiechen, 29-30.

Chapter 3. Ransom and Rescue

Sacrifice emerged from the religious crucible of cult and although in its original context it has an undeniably positive, life enhancing character it also carries along with it, albeit in the contemporary psyche, a negative shadow which reeks of death. It is this pejorative undercurrent which disables sacrifice from operating as a metaphor that effectively transports its meaning across the threshold of the sacred towards the secular world. “The intrinsic efficacy of sacrifices no longer convinces the modern mind, and contemporary enquiries are entitled to something satisfactory with which to replace the ancient convictions about blood sacrifice.”²⁸⁶ The mechanism of salvation that is operative on the Cross, therefore, may not be immediately transparent but what is achieved is nothing less than the total emancipation of the human person from the forces of sin and death. The Cross, itself a machine of death, paradoxically becomes the supreme iconic and totemic symbol of freedom and victory. “The death struggle has somehow been transfigured into the instrument of freedom and life. His cosmic myths of divine combat have pictured the champion as pierced, wounded, even slain but emerging victorious. His records of kingdoms and empires have told of a heroic substitute who bears the ultimate penalty of the social law in order that the condemned may be set free.”²⁸⁷

The New Testament authors when they refer to Christ’s death as a sacrifice are relatively silent on the causal link that is operating between the destruction of death and the liberation of humanity, merely repeating it as an accepted formula.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ Winter, Michael (1995), *Problems in Theology, The Atonement*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 30.

²⁸⁷ Dillistone, F.W. (1968), *Christian Understanding of the Atonement*, James Nesbit & Co, 415.

²⁸⁸ Winter, 37.

However, embedded in the Pauline corpus is a nascent view of the Cross as being triumphant over the forces of evil. The Cross is seen as a weapon that disarms and defeats the cosmic powers whilst simultaneously operating as a celestial battering ram, forcing open the gates of paradise. The Cross seen as a weapon of cosmic warfare and triumph, is a theme well utilised by the earliest Christian polemicists having a long and distinguished rhetorical career. “What the Christian evangelist has ever been concerned to proclaim is that such an event in space and time received its altogether definitive and final enactment when the Son of God willingly exposed himself to the hosts of evil on Golgotha-cosmic and social, personal and psychological; further that the necessary sequel of Golgotha, expressed in the Resurrection event, has opened the gate of everlasting life.”²⁸⁹ It is to this notion of the Cross defeating evil through the victorious Christ, with the ensuing theories of ransom and rescue, that will now be the subject of our enquiry.

The notion of a heroic death, the sacrificial giving up of one’s life to further a cause or save a nation was not unfamiliar to the ancient world. Indeed the Maccabean martyrs had already set a precedent that their lives would be a substitute for the sins of the nation, thereby preserving the good of Israel. Their valiant lives became an acceptable offering of redemptive value, their blood purifying and operating as some sort of ransom for sin. This concept of the noble or effective death already had an acceptable lineage and was not alien to the society of the day. The idea of Christ dying for others could quite easily be placed in this category without alarming sensibilities, for the notion of a heroic death as a holy sacrifice was instantly understood. “The language of ‘dying for’ one’s people or one’s cause became familiar to the ears of everyone in the

²⁸⁹ Dillistone, (1968), 415.

Hellenistic world, being a respected literary and philosophical concept. The rhetoric of a noble death enters into Hellenistic civic cults, courtroom arguments, funerary speeches, and pep talks by soldiers.”²⁹⁰ However, Paul’s usage has more profound ramifications even though it is inextricably linked to the concept of transaction and the buying back of slaves. Paul is a spinner of metaphors and has a pragmatic streak to ensure that the gospel is universally embraced, and thus has no qualms about commandeering language from another domain. Metaphors imported from the slave market, such as *redemption*, could easily find themselves in juxtaposition with the more cultic language of *sacrifice* and *scapegoat*. “Paul seems eager to combine several models for describing the death of Christ, each of which speaks of a transaction. The martyrdom or cultic death amounts to a redemption payment. The transactional nature of slave-redemption is conflated with sacrifice in its aspect of gift or payment to God. Martyrdom, too, is holy like a cultic act and also worth something in God’s eyes (redeeming). Scapegoat joins the mixed image, bringing out the themes of transfer and expulsion of sin.”²⁹¹

The utilisation of a metaphor such as *ransom* then should not cause much surprise being a familiar category employed in the culture of the day. Law and order was the responsibility of the Roman Empire and roads were policed by soldiers for which many travellers benefited, but banditry and hostage taking were not uncommon. Ransom was a fact of life for many and a last resort in moments of dire straits. “The concept of ransom was also part of everyday life at the time when theologians were using the Christus Victor model to explain atonement. In spite of the efforts of the Roman emperors to establish peace and order, marauding gangs roamed the roads,

²⁹⁰ Finlan, 54.

²⁹¹ Ibid., P59.

capturing travellers and demanding a ransom payment for their release. Slaves lived in bondage but could be redeemed and freed for a price.”²⁹² However, what is first used as a metaphor of convenience later becomes petrified into a model that constitutes a system in its own right. Many of the metaphors used by Paul jostle for position but the metaphor of redemption crystallises out into something more abiding and monolithic. “Looking at the Pastorals and at other Deutero-Pauline literature, we see that Paul’s metaphors get turned into doctrinal formulas, with sacrifice and redemption conjoined, justification subordinated, and scapegoat and adoption fading out. Paul’s subtleties are lost on his successors who fuse together and freeze his metaphors. Redemption becomes the controlling figure; even sacrifice is understood as redemption.”²⁹³

The theme of buying back or rescuing hostages from some abductor begins to take on a significant pulse beat, the rhythm of which is picked up by many succeeding Church Fathers. In the New Testament, texts become littered with ransom and redemption terminology.²⁹⁴ Although Paul himself is more mercenary and relaxed in the usage of metaphors, being comfortable in switching from one to the other depending on his audience, the notion of rescue is a model that takes on precedence in other writers. For Paul, his soteriological concern induces him to conflate metaphors, but all work together to underwrite the salvific career of Jesus that climaxes in the duplex movement of Cross and Resurrection and ultimate victory. Paul’s soteriology is

²⁹² Green, 121.

²⁹³ Finlan, 64.

²⁹⁴ “In him we have redemption through his blood.” (Eph. 1:7) “Christ... gave himself a ransom for all.” (1 Tim 2:6). “Who gave himself for us that we might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own?” (Titus 2:14). “You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways...with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish” (1 Peter 1:18-19). “For the notions of ransom.” see also Matt.20:28; Mark 10:45; Heb.9:28; 1 Peter 1:18-19. For the idea of divine victory by means of the Cross, see especially John 12:31-33; Col. 2:13-15; Heb.2:14-15; Rev.5:5-6.

complex and multi-layered and even has suggestions in primitive form of a whiff of penal substitution, but this should not be wrenched out of context and caricatured so as to obscure the more dominant view; notably of Jesus as a “sin bearer” which exchanges a curse for a blessing and sin for righteousness. Neither should it be allowed “to obscure the dimensions of cosmic rescue and typological fulfilment. Christ is martyr-rescuer, punishment-bearer, and promise-fulfiller, emphasising that God had always intended to save all humanity, not just Israel... Jesus’ role, then, for Paul was heroic, tragic, and triumphant.”²⁹⁵

***Christus Victor* – The classic model**

It was the Lutheran Pastor Gustav Aulen in his seminal work “*Christus Victor*” who recovered from the tradition the more primitive and pristine hermeneutic of the Cross being seen as a victory; and this has even been described as the ultimate metaphor. He states categorically: “though it is expressed in a variety of forms, not all of which are equally fruitful, there can be no dispute that it is the dominant idea of the Atonement throughout the early Church period. It is also in reality...the dominant idea in the New Testament.”²⁹⁶ Aulen is right to take cognizance of the biblical and patristic data that is rich in language of conflict and warfare, and right to remind us that this should not be mitigated or tidied up. “The biblical imagery of divine warfare and the metaphors of ransom and of victory are pervasive in scripture, and we should neither ignore them nor domesticate them. A biblical perspective requires a relative cosmic dualism that affirms real warfare, both in Christ’s life and in ours, while at the same

²⁹⁵ Finlan, 65.

²⁹⁶ Aulen Gustav (1940), *Christus Victor*, SPCK, London, 22.

time insisting on the ultimate sovereignty of God.”²⁹⁷ Indeed, this interpretation of the atonement (according to Aulen) reigned supreme for over a thousand years only being eclipsed later by the Latin or legalist view begun with Tertullian, and later reaching its zenith with Anselm and his famous theory of satisfaction.

This juridical outlook, with its accompanying notions of merit and penance, dominated the western Church from then on. Jesus is defeated and dies the inglorious death on a public cross. Yet, paradoxically, he later emerges as one victorious and vindicated; even going so far as to rescue those held captive by the devil in the underworld, “like prisoners of war being released at the cessation of hostilities. Aulen gave prominence to this theory because he considered it to be the classical teaching of Christian antiquity, which had been overshadowed since the Middle Ages by Anselm’s theory of satisfaction.”²⁹⁸ However, other scholars have also seen the political significance of empire being a significant force in the emergence of this model. Like tectonic plates that grind together, the power politics of the day thrusts up a new structure. J. Denny Weaver argues that: “we must understand the historical matrix of Church confronting empire as influencing the development of the Christus Victor motif of the atonement, and also the rise of the Constantinian synthesis of church and empire as causing the abandonment of the Christus Victor model as the explanation of the Atonement.”²⁹⁹

Aulen also referred to the classic view as the *dramatic*, having the hallmarks of a cosmic shoot-out or warfare between God and the forces of evil. “This type of view

²⁹⁷ Boersma, 200.

²⁹⁸ Winter, 67.

²⁹⁹ Weaver, Jenny (1997), *Keeping Salvation Ethical: Mennonite and Amish Atonement Theology in the late Nineteenth Century. Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History*. Herald Press, Scottdale, PA, 39-49.

may be described provisionally as the ‘dramatic’. Its central theme is the idea of the Atonement as a Divine conflict and victory; Christ-Christus Victor-fights the ‘tyrants’ under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to himself.”³⁰⁰ Certainly in the early Church, belief in the pervading presence of evil spirits and the angelic realm was something more or less taken for granted. The desert Fathers, and other rugged pioneers of spiritual combat from St Anthony to Evagrius Ponticus, were well versed in the art and wiles of the evil one. The theme of combat with the Devil even becomes codified in the rule of St Benedict.³⁰¹ The emergence of the Christus Victor theme was, therefore, a natural development of this psychic backdrop or belief in Satanology. “The cosmology of that era also led people to understand conflicts on earth as related to and intertwined with conflict between celestial powers. It is not surprising that Christians framed their discussion of the Cross and resurrection in terms of a cosmic conflict between God and the forces of evil, with the resurrection sealing Jesus Christ’s victory over sin, the Devil and powers of evil.”³⁰² The advantage of this system is that it takes seriously the insidious reality of evil and sin that cannot be dismissed as mythological constructs on which to pin psychological or political realities. “The notion of sin is not just objective, but also highly personal. Thus the classic type can escape the criticism that it views the bondage of sin as an abstract, impersonal force. Moreover, the classic view holds to a broad understanding of sin. It is not just transgression of the law but has to do with the evil powers of death, the Devil, law, and the curse.”³⁰³ Salvation is a drama and cosmic event, a battle that results in an act of restoration or at-one-ment where God

³⁰⁰ Aulen, 20.

³⁰¹ “Having learnt in association with many brethren how to fight against the devil, go out well-armed from the ranks of the community to the solitary combat of the desert.” Benedict, St. (1985), *Rule of St Benedict*, Sheed & Ward, London, Chapter 1.

³⁰² Green, 118.

³⁰³ Boersma, 184.

reconciles the world to himself and in so doing is himself reconciled. “Seen from this side, the triumph over the opposing powers is regarded as a reconciling of God himself; he is reconciled by the very act in which He reconciles the world to himself.”³⁰⁴

Although God is victorious, Aulen himself accepts the limitation of this cosmic drama where it can be seen that it plunges God and his universe into a titanic and dualistic struggle. “The background of the idea is dualistic: God is pictured as in Christ carrying through a victorious conflict against the powers of evil which are hostile to his will. This constitutes Atonement, because the drama is a cosmic drama, and the victory over the hostile powers brings to pass a new relation, a relation of reconciliation, between God and the world.”³⁰⁵ Although a clear advantage here is that salvation is understood from first to last as a work of God (God as warrior) it can also be caricatured as being too triumphalistic, mythological and mitigating of the humanity of Jesus. “A common criticism of Aulen’s book is that it advocates too triumphalistic a view of Atonement and fails to emphasise enough the human and even tragic elements of the story....an examination of the biblical material shows that Aulen is right to speak of a victory, but that it is not merely a divine victory. The victory is at once human and divine.”³⁰⁶ Some scholars have accused Aulen of flirting with Docetism when he suggests that the primary focus has to be on the action that God takes in the redemptive drama. Yet, “the Christus Victor theme posits a close connection between the Incarnation and the Atonement, because the Atonement is the work of God Incarnate. God steps down to bring about reconciliation; people do not bring about their own salvation. Without denying the true manhood of Christ, the

³⁰⁴ Aulen, 21, 47.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 21.

³⁰⁶ Gunton, 1988, 58-59.

classic idea emphasises that it is God who in Christ reconciles the word to himself.”³⁰⁷ Naturally, the theory itself can be exposed as an elaborate construct on a flimsy foundation. If the searchlight of rationalism and the forensic tools of science are brought to bear the theory can evaporate like a will-o’-the-wisp. “If we depersonalise the influence of evil, and demythologize the armies of Satan battling under the banners of darkness, or set it all aside as poetic elaboration of the opposition between good and evil, then at the purely rational level little is left of the theory.”³⁰⁸

The Christus Victor model has many strengths but also many weaknesses, however, to understand why the model was so serviceable and destined to become such a major player in the soteriological language of the first millennium, it will be necessary to look at how various early Fathers endorsed and developed the theme. What all have in common is the recognition of the hegemony that the Devil has over the human situation. The demonic has surreptitiously gained control over the human person ensnaring them in a web of sin and deceit from which they struggle in vain to be freed. Many of the “Church Fathers also looked at the Christus Victor theme not so much from the perspective of sin and punishment but more from that of slavery and freedom, Human beings were not primarily the perpetrators of violence but were first of all the victims of satanic tyranny.”³⁰⁹ The theme itself has two main variants with degrees of emphasis as Finlan points out. The Christus Victor branch subdivides into two: namely the “ransom theory”, in which the Devil was tricked into thinking it had gained power over the Son by killing him, but God triumphs by raising him from the dead and in the process defeats the Devil whilst cheating him of his captives; and secondly the “cosmic battle” version, that stresses Christ’s warrior status and his

³⁰⁷ Boersma, 184.

³⁰⁸ Winter, 68.

³⁰⁹ Boersma, 189.

resurrection which ultimately conquers evil.³¹⁰ One of the early Church Fathers to utilize the ransom theory and also develop such a panoramic view of Christ's work involving descent into our realm to bring about rescue is Irenaeus.³¹¹ On closer inspection, as we shall see, his theological system is more intriguing and evolutionarily radical than it first appears.

Irenaeus' appropriation of the Ransom Theory and its thousand years' supremacy

Indeed, so architecturally significant is the edifice of Irenaeus' theological and anthropological construct that Robert Grant in the opening chapters of his book *Irenaeus of Lyons* refers to "Irenaeus as the most important Christian controversialist and theologian between the apostles and the third century genius Origen"³¹²..... He built up a body of Christian theology that resembled a French Gothic Cathedral, strongly supported by columns of biblical faith and tradition, illuminated by vast expanses of exegetical and logical argument, and upheld by flying buttresses of rhetorical and philosophical considerations from the outside."³¹³ One of Irenaeus' great insights was his theory of *recapitulation* which sees Christ's salvific career as a progressive and dynamic achievement resulting in our own deification or theosis. For Irenaeus, Atonement is not simply a salvage mission, rescuing something after it has gone horribly wrong, it is much more profound than this. He is the first theologian after Paul, however, to seriously entertain the notion of ransom, and "this Ransom

³¹⁰ Finlan, 66.

³¹¹ Irenaeus born between AD 115-125 at Smyrna and served as bishop of Lyons from AD 177 until his death in AD 202.

³¹² Origen of Alexandria, AD 185-254.

³¹³ Grant, Robert, M. (1997), *Irenaeus of Lyons, The Early Church Fathers*, Routledge, Abingdon, Oxford, 1.

theory of Irenaeus' became, and for nearly a thousand years continued to be, the dominant orthodox traditional theory on the subject. The details of the transaction with the Devil vary considerably in different writers."³¹⁴ It is his contribution to the soteriological structure of the Church that makes a serious analysis of his work so crucial.

The whole concept of transaction and ransom obviously raises the question if humanity is enslaved *to whom* was the ransom being paid, God or the Devil? The most common answer was to the Devil and it was Origen of Alexandria who first developed a detailed theory of how Jesus was a ransom payment to the evil one: "To whom did he give his life a ransom for many? Assuredly not to God, could it then be to the Evil One? For he was holding fast until the ransom should be given him, even the life of Jesus; being deceived with the idea that he could have dominion over it, and not seeing that he could not bear the torture in retaining it."³¹⁵ According to Origen, once Jesus was in His charge the penetrating light of Christ's divinity, now revealed, was such an unbearable contradistinction to the Devil's own being, that he had no choice but to release him and all his captives. Christ in a sense carries heaven around with him wherever he goes even, and most especially, when he trespasses into the realm of the dead. St John Chrysostom says that, upon Christ's death, "the Sun of Righteousness descended and shed light upon (the darkness of Hades) and made Hades into heaven. For where Christ is, namely there is heaven."³¹⁶ Conversely, the Devil carries Hell around with him as some diabolic train. "It is highly significant that

³¹⁴Rashdall, Hastings (1919), *The idea of Atonement in Christian Theology*, Macmillan & Co., London, 248.

³¹⁵ *Origen In Mattaueum* 16.8, cited in Green, 122.

³¹⁶ Pitstick, Alyssa Lyra (2007), *Light in Darkness. Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 349.

Bede who, no doubt, believed in a local Hell, is able with equal facility to consider Hell as an ‘act’. In this sense, the Devil, even when he leaves the Hell which is a place carries his Hell everywhere he goes.”³¹⁷ What is significant in the ransom theory is that the Devil is presented as being conquered and even cheated of his ransom, where God uses tactics and a stratagem similar to that of the Devil, but with the sole intention of manoeuvring the devil into a position where he is effectively hoisted by his own petard. It was Origen then who took up Irenaeus’ Ransom theory and who was in turn responsible for stamping the theory on much of the theology of the East and West, emphasising the strategy in which the Devil was outmanoeuvred and outwitted.

For Origen the existence of good and evil spirits was not some literary invention but a real and present concern to Christian and Pagan alike. Origen sees Christ as the rescuer who enters the Devil’s lair. “He (Christ) having become free among the dead and stronger than the power of death and so much stronger than death, that all who will amongst those who are mastered by death may also follow him (i.e. out from Hades, out of death’s domain) death no longer prevailing against them for everyone who is with Jesus is unassailable by death.”³¹⁸ Origen’s soteriology is rooted in a cosmic battle where the resurrection is the trigger that releases the surge in divine energy, which transfigures and transforms the battle lines from within the enemy’s camp. The glory of Christ in His descent is that very resurrection light shining in the underworld, infusing the holy dead with the light of glory. This covert victory by stealth results in the restoration of the divine image in the human person and their ultimate divinisation. “Christ defeated the Devil by rising from the dead and freeing

³¹⁷ von Balthasar, Hans Urs. (1990), *Mysterium Paschale*, T&T Clarke, Edinburgh, 163.

³¹⁸ Matt XVI. 8 Lom. IV.27, cited in Rashdall, 259.

the spirits in prison (1 Peter 3:19)³¹⁹ in the Devil's realm. The Resurrection is at the centre of his theology; Christ and his Resurrection are life-giving fountains from which salvation springs. Justification means believers are really made righteous by Christ not just acquitted because of him and even goes beyond this: Christians can be transformed into the likeness of Christ."³²⁰ This progressive justification and sanctification is typical of a Catholic notion of deeper transformation and ontological change towards holiness, rather than the human person having holiness merely attributed or reputed to them.³²¹

Deception and Gregory of Nyssa

Perhaps the best example of one of the Church Fathers that introduced the theme of deception and the element of trickery into the notion of redemption was Gregory of Nyssa,³²² one of the Cappadocian trio and younger brother of St Basil,³²³ who spawned the idea of Christ's flesh being likened to fish bait on a hook. Although the development of the ransom theme in the direction of deception was not exclusive to him, "it is found in Rufinus and many other earlier writers. It is also found in the life of St Anthony according to Athanasius, where Christ catches the Devil like a Dragon

³¹⁹ 1 Peter 3:19 simply states: "In which he went and preached to the spirits in prison."

³²⁰ Finlan, 67-68.

³²¹ "Therefore, if anyone says that a sinner, who is justified by God through Jesus Christ, is or remains unrighteous, but is somehow reputed to be righteous, rather than becoming righteous, so that this justification is only the imputation of righteousness, let him be condemned." Canon 1, Council of Trent 5.386. 12-4. Quoted in McGrath, Alister. *Iustitia Dei*, 328. Also, Canon 11. (1561) *On Justification*. "If anyone says that people are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Spirit and inherent in them; or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favour of God: let him be condemned." Neuner, J & Dupius, J. (Editors). *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 568.

³²² AD 335-398.

³²³ Basil of Caesarea AD 329-379.

on a hook. The idea of a trick may have been suggested by 1 Cor 2:8.”³²⁴ St Augustine later uses the simile of a mousetrap; as mice are enticed into the trap by the bait, so Christ is the bait by which the Devil is caught,³²⁵ but when the Devil oversteps the mark by attacking the divine Son he initiates a legal penalty against himself. Finlan suggests that although Gregory does have a ransom theory, a better appellation would be that of *Rescue*. “Gregory, picks up the idea of Irenaeus, but says something the latter never did: that the Devil has legitimate power over humans, since they sold themselves into the Devil’s power. God has no right just to steal people away from the Devil, but has every right to buy back these people.”³²⁶ He then jettisons the established ransom formulae introducing the novelty of deception. Salvation is no longer the result of an old-fashioned trade-off with the Devil pure and simple, but now becomes a test of nerve and a game of deceit and one-upmanship.

In Gregory’s own words he spells out the fishing analogy in detail: “In order to secure that the ransom on our behalf might be easily accepted by him who required it, the Deity was hidden under the veil of our nature, that so, as with ravenous fish, the hook of the deity might be gulped down along with the bait of flesh, and thus, life being introduced into the house of death, and light shining in the darkness, that which is diametrically opposed to light and life might vanish; for it is not the nature of darkness to remain when light is present or of death to exist when life is active.”³²⁷ Like Origen the theme of Christ’s light illuminating the dark dungeon of Satan’s prison is played out. And it is here that the Devil, overreaching himself, is repulsed and vanquished by the brightness of Christ’s Divinity, which is antithetical to the

³²⁴ “None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.” 1 Cor.2:8, see Rashdall, 248.

³²⁵ Aulen, 69.

³²⁶ Finlan, 69.

³²⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, (XXII) cited in Boersma, 190.

darkness of his kingdom. Despite the obvious caricature of the mythological plot some scholars have argued that the idea of deception and ransom stretches the biblical data itself to breaking point. Moreover, it is not consistent with other scriptural references that locate the Devil as being perfectly aware of the true nature and identity of Jesus of Nazareth. “In the gospels the demons appear to have little doubt as to Christ’s true identity (Mark 1:25, 34; 3:11)....What is more, is Satan’s ownership such that God had to pay him a ransom to be just? While the ransom idea itself is indeed biblical, it would stretch the biblical data to infer that Satan is the recipient of the price.”³²⁸

However, like many of the early Church Fathers, Gregory has an upbeat and positive portrayal of the Incarnation perceiving this as having a more strategic and important role than the crucifixion, and to a certain extent the resurrection. He clearly presents the atonement as flowing directly from the Incarnation, with the result that the crucifixion is relegated to a comparatively minor and secondary position.³²⁹ “Then since what was needed was the ascent of the whole of our nature from death to renewal of life, he stretched out a hand as it were over the prostrate body, and in bending down to our dead corpse he came so near to death as to come into contact with our state of mortality and by his own body to bestow on human nature a beginning of the resurrection, by raising up through his power the whole of man along with himself.”³³⁰ For Gregory it is the Incarnation that unites the human race with God bridging the gulf that separates humanity and God which was a result of the estrangement created by original sin. St Gregory of Nazianzus³³¹ and fellow

³²⁸ Boersma, 191.

³²⁹ Winter, 53.

³³⁰ *Oration Catechetica* XXXII, cited in Winter, 53.

³³¹ AD 325-89.

Cappadocian rightly objects to the idea that a ransom would have to be paid either to Satan or to God; “The question is: To whom was offered the blood that was shed for us, and why was it offered, this precious and glorious blood of our God, our high priest, our sacrifice? We were held captive by the Evil one, for we had been ‘sold into the bondage of sin’, and our wickedness was the price we paid for our pleasure. Now a ransom is normally paid only to the captor; and so the question is, to whom was this ransom offered, and why? To the Evil One? What an outrage!If it were paid to the Father, I ask why? We were not held captive by him.”³³² The problem with the deception theory despite its proponents advocating it as an expression of God’s wisdom and justice, is that it is precisely these qualities that are compromised. God is seen to operate with double standards using the same devices employed by the Devil but to even greater effect. God appears to act duplicitously and in a questionably moral way. “Many would argue that the divine deception involved in the exchange seriously compromises God’s justice. By using deception or violence God would use the same means that Satan had initially used to introduce sin into the world.... Whereas Satan’s deception of Adam was for the ruin of human nature, God’s deception was for our salvation.”³³³

The ransom theory may have its limitations, but at least it takes seriously the enslavement of the human person and the relative powerlessness of the individual to be an architect of their own liberation. Christ’s ministry is strewn with examples of Jesus’ “signs of power”, miracles or exorcisms of deliverance which underscore the notion that Jesus’ primary role was to liberate from bondage. The human person is in need of a redeemer and although liberation comes at a price, it is initiated by God at

³³² Gregory Nazianzus, *Oratio XLV*, 22, cited in Winter, 50-51.

³³³ Boersma, 191-192.

the outset for he alone has the resources to bring this about. In the words of St Basil, the third member of the Cappadocian trio: “Every human soul has submitted to the evil yoke of slavery; slavery to the common enemy of all. Mankind has been despoiled of the liberty which was the gift of the creator and has been brought into captivity through sin. Now, for any captive to recover his liberty a ransom is required; nor is it possible for a brother to ransom his brother, nor for each to ransom himself, for the ransomer must be far superior to the conquered slave.”³³⁴ This model of ransom subsequently evolved into more exotic forms and with the addition of a legal twist laid the foundations for the idea of exchange and penal substitution. “When the ransom theory got into the hands of legally minded westerns like Tertullian and his successors that it bore its bitterest fruit, and became the parent of many other views which have continued to blacken the character of God long after the formal abandonment of the ransom theory itself.”³³⁵ However, early proponents of the argument avoid trespassing into language that smacks at using violence either by means of appeasement or transaction. “Irenaeus, Origen and Gregory of Nyssa each avoid even hinting at Christ appeasing God the Father or the Father punishing the Son...Origen strongly dismisses the notion that Jesus Christ was supplying a ransom payment to God the Father.”³³⁶

To sum up, although the Christus Victor model entertains the notion of metaphysical dualism where the forces of evil are personified, it does at least take seriously the supremacy of God as a divine warrior who, through the Cross of Christ, achieves victory over his wayward creation. That said, it may appear a victory that is somewhat remote to us and one in which a done deal has been achieved on our behalf, but one in

³³⁴ Basil of Caesarea, *Homily on Psalm 48:3*, cited in Winter, 49-50.

³³⁵ Rashdall, 325.

³³⁶ Green, 124.

which we are hardly involved. The distant drum beat of Christ the conqueror is indeed far off, diminishing any sense of urgent need to engage with the forces of evil that continue to dehumanise; the war may be won but hot-zones of engagement still prevail. But on the positive side the Christus Victor theme looks at sin not just as personal vice, but as an institutional problem as well. Sin thus becomes identified with abuse of power and cemented into structures, structural sin. Moreover, the Christus Victor theme takes liberation from bondage seriously as well as the notion of Jesus' combat with the demonic in the scriptural data, where to be saved is to be freed from enslavement to evil. Despite the extremes of cosmic dualism, the Christus Victor motif at least entails a serious view of human evil, acknowledging that human effort alone will not dissipate its influence.³³⁷

The theory itself may have reigned supreme for over a thousand years but when it reached the rationalism and legal mind of Anselm, he rejected it not only as being fanciful but also illogical. "For Anselm, the ransom theory was discredited, not only by its intellectual absurdity but by its irreverence.... Anselm absolutely denied that the Devil ever had any lawful authority over man or any rights which God was bound to respect."³³⁸ Yet the political circumstances had changed. Christianity was no longer removed from the centre of political life, no longer on the edge but a significant player in the power politics of the day. This meant that victory as a metaphor, achieved by ransom, which spoke eloquently to an underclass of slaves, was becoming increasingly mute as a result of Christianity's increasing social acceptability. "The decline of the use of the Christus Victor motif after the sixth century, was more likely caused by changing cosmology and the Constantinian

³³⁷ See Boersma, 198.

³³⁸ Rashdall, 350.

synthesis of church and state. The tension between the empire and the Church had, in the early days, funded an atonement theology grounded in the image of Christ conquering even in death. When the Church became so closely linked with worldly powers, then a conflict-victory metaphor was less connected to people's daily lives."³³⁹ Yet it must said, that even today with the reality of hostage taking in political and military unstable areas such as Iraq and Afghanistan, where special forces have to go in on raids to free hostages from Islamic extremists, the Christus Victor theme still has an uncanny and abiding relevance.

Irenaeus's theory of recapitulation

Irenaeus of Lyons is perhaps the most ingenious exponent of all the ransom and rescue theories that prevail and for this reason deserves special consideration. It is a theory that is breathtaking in its sweep and soteriological depth, whose trajectory results in nothing less than the perfectibility of the human condition and its resultant divinisation. "Thus God planned everything in advance for the perfection of man, and for the realization and revelation of His dispensations, that His goodness might be displayed, His justice fulfilled, the Church conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29), and that man might one day be mature, mature enough to see and understand God."³⁴⁰ Yet despite an upbeat outlook it maintains a realistic grip on the damaged and immature state of the human condition. "Therefore the word acknowledged himself as son of man, recapitulating in himself that primal man from whom the formation of the woman was made, so that as through the defeated man our race went down to death, so again through man the victor we might ascend into life, and as

³³⁹ Green, 125.

³⁴⁰ Irenaeus (selected and Introduced by von Balthasar. Hans Urs), (1981), *The Scandal of The Incarnation. Irenaeus Against the Heresies*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 71, (Book IV 37.7).

death won the prize over us by man, so again by man we might win the prize over death.”³⁴¹ Liberation comes through the God-man becoming our representative who passes through all the stages of human existence, retracing and reversing our fallen condition. “He neither rejected nor went beyond the human condition and did not abolish in his person the law of human growth, but he sanctified every age by the resemblance we have with him.”³⁴² He reaffirms this by saying that he passes through *every age* thereby endorsing his own credibility as archetypal man, the second Adam, even though old age is not entered into, it is in principle, as Christ reaches mature manhood before his own death.

It is a soteriology of repair but at the same time a progressive movement upward to advancement and maturity. Irenaeus’ theory of recapitulation³⁴³ is, therefore, worthy of closer scrutiny being a model of atonement that shines more brilliantly than most. As stated earlier, Irenaeus utilizes the metaphor of ransom, a metaphor that was picked up by later Church fathers and embraced with far more vigour and seriousness. “Irenaeus does allow that Christ’s death was a ransom payment to the Devil, but this notion is not developed and does not form the core of his soteriology. For one thing, the Devil had not gained his rights over humanity legitimately but by violence. Irenaeus sees Christ rescuing humanity by rescuing human nature itself. This is known as the doctrine of ‘recapitulation’.”³⁴⁴ Ransom, itself, therefore, fits into a wider framework for Irenaeus, although it remains an underpinning motive of the whole soteriological structure, for Satan had taken possession of mankind becoming

³⁴¹ Grant, 173, citing Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* (Book V 21.1).

³⁴² Ibid., 114.

³⁴³ “St Paul coined the word ‘recapitulation’ to express the meaning of the Incarnation: it was God’s plan to ‘bring everything together under Christ as Head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth’, (Eph. 1:10) as recapitulation (anakephalaiosis), Christ is the Head (caput, Kephale) of the world.” Irenaeus, 53.

³⁴⁴ Finlan, 67.

man's lawful lord. The rules of engagement and the universal concept of justice meant that deliverance without a payment would be unbecoming to God.³⁴⁵ Ransom is always regarded as a *payment* to the powers of evil, or even to death, by which their influence is neutralised and overcome.³⁴⁶ Their influence as such is crass and exploitive; it abuses humanity's inherent weakness and immaturity. "When one traces the Christus Victor theme in Irenaeus, a dynamic picture emerges; Satan has abused Adam and Eve's moral immaturity, tempted them into disobedience, and thus captured and imprisoned the human race. Repeatedly, Irenaeus refers to Satan as the 'strong man', whom Christ has bound and robbed (Matt 12:29)."³⁴⁷

For Gustav Aulen, commenting on Irenaeus, it is God who is the active agent of salvation: "where God is both the reconciler and the reconciled",³⁴⁸ although to do justice to the anti-Gnostic and anti-Docetic polemic of Irenaeus he says that: "the work of redemption is accomplished by Christ as man."³⁴⁹ He elaborates this point further by saying: "the redemptive work is accomplished *by* the logos *through* the manhood as His instrument."³⁵⁰ However, although the Incarnation is considered of strategic importance, it is not considered sufficient to immunise the human race with a dose of divinity, in order to repair the damage done by the virus of disobedience, that rages like a death dance in the blood of humanity. "If Irenaeus had completely followed Platonic logic, however, then Christ would simply be the bearer of a mysterious heavenly substance brought to earth to inoculate humanity with the divine.

³⁴⁵ Rashdall, 248.

³⁴⁶ Aulen, 47.

³⁴⁷ Boersma, 188.

³⁴⁸ Aulen, 47.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 49.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 50.

In that case, the Incarnation itself would have been sufficient for salvation.”³⁵¹ But Irenaeus did not hold this view, for the death and resurrection also had a significant part to play, as indeed did the sovereignty of the will exercised in moral choices that perennially confront the human person.

Christ overturns the previous order by reversing and reconstituting the human condition in a new and pristine fashion. “Therefore he came in visible form into his own region (John 1:1) and was made flesh (John 1:14) and was hanged from the wood, in order to recapitulate everything in himself. And his own did not receive him.”³⁵² Humanity finally wakes up to their plight and can now imitate Christ who gently persuades, not through violence but by example, how to fulfil one’s heavenly destiny. “By recapitulating both Adam’s life and his death, Christ retraced and in principle restored humanity to incorruptibility and immortality. While this means that Irenaeus’ atonement theology has an objective component - Christ truly gained the victory through his life and his death - it also implies a subjective pole: Christ is now our perfect teacher, who rescues us from forgetfulness and imparts true knowledge, as well as our moral example, who persuades us to imitate him.”³⁵³ The chains by which Satan has bound the human condition are broken free and Satan in turn is incarcerated. “So in recapitulating everything he recapitulated our war against the enemy. He called forth and defeated the one who at the beginning in Adam had led us captive, and he trod on his head.”³⁵⁴

³⁵¹ Green, 120-121.

³⁵² Grant, 170, citing Irenaeus (Book V 18.3).

³⁵³ Boersma, 187.

³⁵⁴ Grant, 173, citing Irenaeus (Book V 21.1).

The Devil is crushed in defeat and death itself is destroyed, although there is obviously the sense of the *now but not yet* quality about it otherwise it would have the character of a completely over-realized eschatology. The mechanism that is used is most definitely “persuasion” and not violence and here lies the key to Irenaeus’ insight into how Christ gains the victory. “He did not use violence, as the apostasy had done at the beginning when it usurped dominion over us, greedily snatching what was not its own. No, He used persuasion. It was fitting for God to use persuasion, not violence, to obtain what He wanted, so that justice should not be infringed and God’s ancient handiwork not be utterly destroyed.”³⁵⁵ Obedience overturns disobedience and reverses the whole process. Christ’s obedience in the face of temptation is for Irenaeus a significant part of the answer to the question of *how* Christ gains the victory over Satan, sin and death. “As for the Devil, who is merely an apostate angel, he can only do what he did in the beginning, that is seduce and lead astray the mind of man to transgress the commandments of God and gradually blind the hearts of those who hear him and forget the true God, worshipping this one God.”³⁵⁶ The Devil can only tempt but the project is to pollute the freedom of the human race by introducing the notion of independence and resistance into the mind of humanity, to plant the very seeds of sedition; But Christ becomes humanity’s model and teacher showing us how to uproot these noxious weeds of rebellion at their conception. “Christ gained the victory not by employing counter-violence but by faithful obedience in the face of satanic temptation. The theory of recapitulation clearly implies that it is not only the death of Christ but also the life of Christ that has redemptive significance.”³⁵⁷

³⁵⁵ Irenaeus, 56 (Book V 1.1).

³⁵⁶ Grant, 174, citing Irenaeus (Book V 24.2).

³⁵⁷ Boersma, 124.

The whole concept of Christ acting as our head and retracing our footsteps in order to repair and reverse the trajectory towards death is achieved by Christ becoming human. “And he recapitulated in himself the work originally fashioned, because, just as through the disobedience of one man sin came in, and through sin death prevailed (Rom.5:12-19), so also through the obedience of one man justice was brought in and produced the fruit of life for men formerly dead.”³⁵⁸ By becoming our representative he gets it right and overturns the wrong choices made by Adam. In recapitulation Christ both sums up and restores humanity.³⁵⁹ Christ heals each progressive phase of human life by living through it; his obedience in each stage of life repairs the damage done by human sin. The tree of the Cross reverses the rapacious looting from the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden. “Therefore when the Lord obviously came into his own domain, with his own creation bearing him up as it was borne by him, and by his obedience on the tree recapitulating the disobedience in the tree, and with the seduction of that betrothed virgin Eve dissipated by the truth announced by the angel to Mary.”³⁶⁰ It is this dynamic renewal and renovation, being much more than a mere salvage operation, which takes the insights of Irenaeus to a new soteriological plateau. Indeed, according to Irenaeus the reversal of disobedience is so complete that the restoration project takes place not only in Christ but Mary, thus producing a fitting and holistic symmetry. “This is why the law gives the name ‘wife’ to a woman who is betrothed to a man but still a virgin, thereby indicating the circular movement from Mary back to Eve. What was bound could be untied without a reversal of the process of entanglement. The first bonds had to be untied by the second, so that the second bond playing the role of loosener of the first....Similarly, the knot of Eve’s

³⁵⁸ Grant 139, citing Irenaeus (Book III 21.9, 21.10).

³⁵⁹ Green, 120.

³⁶⁰ Grant, 170-171, citing Irenaeus (Book V 18.3, 19.1).

disobedience was untied through the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve tied through unbelief, the Virgin Mary set free through faith.”³⁶¹

The recapitulation of the human race is thus complete but this technical word can now be seen to be more dynamic and progressive than on first utterance. “The key word ‘recapitulate’ (*anakephalaiosis*) has been something of a problem for translators. Usually it is rendered as ‘recapitulate,’ which is literal, but hardly does justice to the Greek by reason of its modern English meaning which has become little more than ‘summing up’ or ‘repeat’. The real meaning is much more creative, and denotes something like reassembling the separated limbs of a corpse and bringing them to life again under the control of the head.”³⁶² For Irenaeus, the descent into Hell³⁶³ and the journey into the realm of the dead is a significant descent of solidarity but also ultimately rescue for humanity. He states: “For since the Lord ‘went into the middle of the shadow of death’ Psalm 22:4) where the souls of the dead were, and then rose bodily and only after the resurrection was taken up into heaven.”³⁶⁴

Rescue through descent, *The Harrowing of Hell*

The notion of rescue by descending into the enemy’s realm and plundering the Devil of his hostages has its formulation in the Apostles’ creed, where after Jesus dies he

³⁶¹ Irenaeus, 61 (Book III 22.4).

³⁶² Winter, 42.

³⁶³ “Hell as a whole may be differentiated into at least three species: gehenna, purgatory, and sheol; according to a long-standing theological view, there is also a limbo (from the Latin *limbus*, meaning edge or threshold) for unbaptized children, the *limbus puerorum*. Although it may sound strange to the contemporary ear, one can use the generic name in reference to each species: the hell of the damned (gehenna) the hell of purification (purgatory), the hell of the Fathers (sheol), and the hell of the children (limbo). Though these four abodes of the dead are very different in character, hell in all these cases can be represented with the generic Latin neuter, *infernus*.” Pitstick, 14.

³⁶⁴ Grant, 178, citing Irenaeus (Book V 21.2).

does not go straight to heaven but it states that: “He descended into hell.”³⁶⁵ The classic orthodox theological understanding of the Harrowing of Hell is that Christ descended, not to the hell of the damned but to its threshold or forecourt, the limbo of the Fathers (*Sheol*), for the purposes of rescue and liberation. “Christ descended in His soul united to His divine person only to the limbo of the Fathers. His power and authority were felt throughout all the abodes of hell, although differently in each one. His descent accomplished two purposes, the liberation of the just and the proclamation of His universal power. Finally, in this glorious descent, Christ did not suffer the pain proper to any of the abodes of hell.”³⁶⁶ Christ’s descent is thus a glorious one, a manifestation of his light and power and although he assumes the punishment for sin in his humanity (i.e. death) in his divinity he continues to enjoy the beatific vision.³⁶⁷ Indeed, part of his mission is to confer in the process of liberation the glory of heaven onto those held captive. In western representations of Christ’s descent he frequently carries the standard of the Cross as staff or a long narrow flag with the red cross of St George emblazoned on it. “He usually stands only just inside a doorway, the gate of hell, indicating that His soul did not descend to its farthest depths, gehenna, but only to the holy dead whom He is shown drawing forth. As in the Byzantine icon, Christ grasps the wrist, or occasionally hand, of Adam, drawing him forth from hell, represented by the walls of a fortress, a cave, or the mouth of a

³⁶⁵ New Testament passages that have been used to support the idea that Jesus Christ descended into Hell (Acts 2:27; Romans 10:6-7; Ephesians 4:8-9; 1 Peter 3:18-20; and 1 Peter 4:6). Western reference to the descent into hell did not begin to appear in the creedal tradition until the fourth century (although it may have appeared in some much earlier Eastern creedal settings) it was not incorporated into the Apostles’ Creed until considerably later. See Kelly, J.N.D. (1960), *Early Christian Creeds*, Longman, Green and Co. Ltd., London, 378-83. MacCulloch clarifies the point by saying: “Though belief in our Lord’s Descent to Hades existed in the Church from the apostolic age, it did not expressly appear in the Baptismal creeds at an early date. Rufinus (c.400) says that *descendit ad inferna* existed in the creed used at Aquileia, [but] adds that the Roman creed did not contain the words, and that they were not found in the Eastern Churches. This is true of the Baptismal creeds, for the earliest approximation to the formula occurs in the allied creeds of the synods (of AD 359) and of Constantinople A.D. 360.” MacCulloch, J.A. D.D. (1930), *The Harrowing of Hell: A Comparative Study of an Early Christian Doctrine*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 67.

³⁶⁶ Pistick, 46, 112-113.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 66, 69.

large beast. Behind Adam are visible the souls of the just, often depicted with halos and in a posture of supplication.” However, there is not always a consensus between the early Fathers of the Church on this doctrine, for example, St Augustine thought the idea of conversion after death and the ongoing preaching of the gospel in hell,³⁶⁸ to be contrary to both reason and faith,³⁶⁹ for it undermined the necessity and urgency of preaching the gospel in this life. This is consistent with the later view of the protestant reformers, where Jesus on the Cross experiences the full force of hell as a form of spiritual torment, devoid of any consideration of a spatial or geographic *descensus*.³⁷⁰

Hell being emptied has some precursor in a corpus of literature from the Ethiopian book of Enoch where Enoch is commissioned to go to the fallen angels and to disclose to them in one short shocking statement: “that they will find no peace”. It is clear, then, that the theologoumenon of the Hades journey of Christ into the underworld may have as its model the legend of Enoch.³⁷¹ The Gnostic gospel of Nicodemus in particular has the most colourful and graphic account of the liberation of Hades where it says: “Again the voice sounded, ‘Lift up the gates’. When Hades

³⁶⁸ 1 Peter 3:18-20.

³⁶⁹ St Augustine, Ep. 164, Letters, 391, cited in Pitstick, 53. However, there are ambiguities in Augustine’s treatment of eschatology as Daley elaborates: “Throughout his life, Augustine remained convinced that the souls of some of the dead, who are condemned to punishment immediately after death because of their sins, will be released from that punishment before God’s sentence of judgement is passed... Augustine frequently insists, however, that not all the dead are capable of receiving God’s mercy through the prayers and meritorious actions of the Church done in their name. Yet Augustine will also seem to indicate that ‘hell is not a permanent state...until the common passage of creatures from time into eternity.’” Daley, Brian E. S.J. (1991), *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology*, Cambridge University Press, 138, 139.

³⁷⁰ Calvin writes: “This story (Christ’s descent to free the patriarchs from prison), although it is repeated by great authors, and even today is earnestly defended as true by any persons, still is nothing but a story. It is childish to enclose the souls of the dead in prison. What need, then, for Christ’s soul to go down there to release them?” Calvin, *Institutes*, II, xvi.9, 514.

³⁷¹ “For the understanding of the text about the journey into Hades it is of decisive importance to know that it has an antithetical model in the Ethiopian book of Enoch, which received its present form after the Parthian invasion of 37 BC. Chapters 12 to 16 describe how Enoch was commissioned to go to the fallen angels of Genesis 6, and to disclose to them that ‘they will find no peace and no pardon.’” von Balthasar, 1990, 159-160.

heard the voice the second time, he answered as if he did not know it said, ‘Who is the king of glory?’ The angels of the Lord said, ‘The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.’ And immediately at this answer the gates of brass were broken in pieces and the bars of iron were crushed and all the dead who were bound were loosed from their chains, and we with them. And the king of glory entered in like a man, and all the dark places of Hades were illumined...³⁷² However, it is also to St Augustine that we owe the clarification with regard to the distinction between Hades and Hell, namely between the underworld where *all* the dead dwelt, and the realm of confinement where the non-elect were especially incarcerated, where there is no hope of rescue or release.³⁷³ In the biblical corpus of the Old Testament and inter-testamental literature Hell or *Sheol* was simply portrayed as a place of shades, a twilight world of lingering forgetfulness where one’s existence was suspended in a country of silence and solitude. Here one’s identity and even remembrance by God was blotted out, despite one’s pleading for rescue.³⁷⁴

A more contemporary rendition of the doctrine of the harrowing of Hell is found in the work of Hans Urs von. Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*. Although he does not strictly represent the traditional Catholic position, he suggests that Jesus’ descent is a logical continuum of his solidarity with the human condition and the ultimate goal of the Incarnation. It is a radical extension of the suffering endured on the Cross. “For Balthasar, then, the Descent is a continuation of the Cross. It is a continuation of expiation and it is a continuation of suffering. Indeed, it is the completion and perfection of both of these, for only in Sheol is there redemption accomplished. Christ

³⁷² From *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, Chapters 5-7, ‘The Descent into Hell,’ cited in Porter, J.R. (2001), *The Lost Bible. Forgotten Scriptures Revealed*, Duncan Baird Publishers, London, 150.

³⁷³ Oakes, Edward T., cited in Evans, C. Stephen (editor), (2006), *Exploring Kenotic Christology, The Self-Emptying God*, Oxford University Press, 227.

³⁷⁴ Psalm 87:7-15.

suffers more in Sheol than He suffered on the Cross, more than the souls waiting for him there.”³⁷⁵ Indeed, Balthasar argues that Sheol is a spiritual condition and that he experiences the reality of human death and even the *Visio Mortis* in contrast to the *Visio Dei*, the beatific vision, which is eclipsed in his sojourn through Sheol (the only region of Hell that Balthasar actually contemplates). Jesus tastes death and the anguish of abandonment by the Father. “We cannot say that Jesus, instead of the sinner, is punished by God. Nor can we say that He feels damned by God and placed in Hell. For we associate the state of Hell with a hatred of God where the gates of Hell are closed and locked from the inside. It would be meaningless to ascribe to the crucified the slightest resentment toward God. But it is quite possible to speak of the Son of God suffering what the sinner deserved, i.e. separation from God, perhaps even complete and final separation.”³⁷⁶ His obedience is thus no longer an active obedience but rather cadaver obedience, the obedience of a corpse.³⁷⁷ Unlike earlier presentations of the Descent in both East and West which assumed that Jesus was active in Hell (1 Peter 3:18 where it says that he “preached” to the spirits in prison) Balthasar insists on his total passivity. It is here that Jesus experiences the total reality of the sinful condition of the human being, stripped of faith, hope, love, and any prospect of redemption in a state of apparent Godforsakenness.³⁷⁸ Balthasar elucidates: “In Sheol, in the Pit, all that region is the darkness of perfect loneliness. But to be without contact with God *means* to be without the inner light of faith, hope, love...If Jesus has suffered on the Cross the sin of the world to the very last truth of this sin (to be forsaken by God), then he must experience, in the solidarity with the sinners who

³⁷⁵ Pitstick, 105.

³⁷⁶ von Balthasar, Hans Urs (1983), *Does Jesus Know Us? Do We Know Him?* trans. Graham Harrison, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 36.

³⁷⁷ Lauber, David (2004), *Barth on the Descent into Hell. God, Atonement and the Christian life*, Ashgate Publishing company, Aldershot, England, 83. (The designation of the form of obedience of the dead Christ comes from St Francis of Assisi, see von Balthasar, 1990, 174).

³⁷⁸ Matthew 27:46.

have gone to the underworld, their (ultimately hopeless) separation from God, otherwise he would not have known all the phases and conditions of what it means for man to be unredeemed yet awaiting redemption.”³⁷⁹

But Jesus does not stay dead, and as the trajectory of his passage through Sheol is defined in the harrowing of Hell, once his mission of rescue is complete he returns to life more revived and glorious than before, in the glory of the resurrection. It is this upward curve, the return journey that identifies Jesus’ true ontology and mission. The human person is heaven-bound, being left in no doubt after Jesus audaciously raising the standard of victory in the enemy’s own territory, reclaiming the whole of creation for himself. Jesus goes where even angels fear to tread, for no place is off limits to him.³⁸⁰ Thus, it is to the very motive that lies behind the redemptive drama that must now be analysed; in the realisation that God is in essence love³⁸¹ and it is essentially a sacrificial love that flows between members of the Trinity that is the catalyst for salvation and the restoration of all of creation.³⁸² It is to Peter Abelard’s penetrating medieval insight, that love is the beating heart of the atonement that we must now turn. Love may be an antithetical emotion to the adrenaline-fuelled special forces style raid of ransom and rescue, but nevertheless it is a connecting metaphor with that of sacrifice; as Sergius Bulgakov states: “The Son Himself, made incarnate and human, is the High Priest, who enters with His sacrificial blood into the Holy of Holies of the Trinitarian Divinity. The sacrifice of the Son presupposes the co-sacrificial love of the entire Holy Trinity ‘God so loved the world’ (John 3:16), and

³⁷⁹ von Balthasar, Hans Urs (1995), ‘*Descent into Hell*’, in *Explorations in Theology* vol. IV; *Spirit and Institution*, trans. Edward T. Oakes, S.J. Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 395.

³⁸⁰ Psalm 138:7-8.

³⁸¹ John 4:8, 4:16.

³⁸² Romans 8:22-23.

love has no power without sacrifice.”³⁸³ It is also the reason that God became Incarnate in the first instance,³⁸⁴ so as to embark on the process of restoring friendship with humanity in the free gift of reconciliation. The wounds of Christ are thus also wounds of love³⁸⁵ as Abelard keenly demonstrates, love isn’t simply a feel good factor, an ethical and subjective impulse geared to imitating the saviour but rather an objective reality ontologically linked to God’s nature and grace. Grace alone has the capacity to transform hearts and minds as well as *lift up*, thereby reversing, restoring and healing (or as Irenaeus’ would say “recapitulating”) the crippled state of original sin that had incapacitated the human condition to the point where humanity became unable to reach the kingdom of Heaven unaided. Only love, which is a sacramental reflection of the living God, has the power to rescue,³⁸⁶ and redeem.

³⁸³ Bulgakov, 354.

³⁸⁴ John Duns Scotus, however, saw a unity between God’s creative and redemptive work and suggested the second person of the Trinity would have become Incarnate regardless, this view was challenged by Thomas Aquinas who taught that if human beings had not sinned there would have been no Incarnation. See O’Collins, cited in Davies, Stephen (2006), Kendall, Daniel and O’Collins, Gerard (Editors), *The Redemption, An Interdisciplinary Symposium on Christ as Redeemer*, Oxford University Press, 18.

³⁸⁵ Stein, 196.

³⁸⁶ Daniel 6:27.

Chapter 4. The Power of Love

Peter Abelard³⁸⁷ was arguably one of the most fertile minds and innovative theologians of the twelfth century. Although he started as a logician and academic of the schools, a passionate and illicit love affair with Heloise, a girl for whom he was a tutor, and its aftermath, was to have far reaching ramifications that changed not only the course of his own personal history, but facilitated an insight into the motive of what inspired God's dealings with humanity in the act of Redemption. His experience of human love was to enable him to recapture a significant insight into the transforming power of love and to apply this logic to what lay behind God's dealings with his world. Indeed his articulation of love as being the sublime revelation and actualization of who God is, fleshed out in the Incarnation and poured out on the Cross for humanity, is not just an insight shaped from the medieval world of courtly love, or indeed even from his own personal history, but one from the very heart of God itself. It is in the "self-determination of his nature that God performs the mighty act of redemption in Jesus Christ; He is moved by love to purpose the restoration of his fallen creatures; his nature as love dictates his self-manifestation in Jesus Christ, the mediator who assumes manhood in order to touch sinful mankind at the point of its disorder. The Incarnation marks the scope of God's compassion; the Cross marks the intensity of his love. Christ is the revealer of God's love and man's redeemer."³⁸⁸

Love not only reveals itself in the drama of salvation that climaxes on the Cross, but fundamentally also has the ability to transform that which it touches. Love goes where

³⁸⁷ AD 1079-1142.

³⁸⁸ Weingart, Richard E. (1970), *The Logic of Divine Love. 'A Critical Analysis of the Soteriological of Peter Abelard'*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 149.

it hurts and heals the disorder in the human person, not just individualistically or subjectively but actually, in an intense exchange of love that emanates from the divine-human encounter. The Incarnation and the Cross represent the summit of divine communication, where love is the universal language that leaves nothing untouched and has within itself the capacity to change everything. For “love is the constitutive element for all God’s relationship with his creatures. It is the motivating power in creation and subsequently in re-creation; it is the controlling force in providence and in restoration of fallen creation. God’s essence is love; his fellowship with man is imprinted by Love. Abelard is consistent in his delineation of the logic of divine love in all facets of the relationship obtaining between God and man.”³⁸⁹ To reduce Abelard’s insights to a mere exemplary or ethical model of the atonement with a strong whiff of Pelagianism attached would indeed be a caricature of his position. It is with some necessity, therefore, that a closer reading of Abelard is required with the intention of reclaiming his insights in the field of soteriological study, so that the power of love can again be appreciated as one of the salient and abiding models for any understanding of atonement theory.

For the sake of clarity, it will be useful to observe how Abelard dismisses and refutes other theories of the Atonement that captured the minds of his contemporaries, which may have contributed to his condemnation and censuring at the council of Sens.³⁹⁰ Abelard rejects as illogical and absurd both the dominant theories of the day, the Ransom and Satisfaction theories promoted by the Fathers and Anselm in his *Cur Deus Homo?* respectively. Both theories are suspect because they impose a limitation on God’s free action, effectively encasing the divine will in a system of soteriological

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 35-36.

³⁹⁰ 1140-1141.

scaffolding that is imposed from without. “First, Christ was not Incarnated to redeem sinful mankind from a lawful dominion of the Devil. Second, Christ was not Incarnated to offer satisfaction to God or to appease his wrath. The soteriological explanations known as the ‘dramatic theory’, and the ‘satisfaction theory’ are both rejected by Abelard, because of the intrinsic defect that they impose on God, an alien necessity which controverts the biblical affirmation that freely elects to redeem sinners because he is love.”³⁹¹ The Devil may have held humanity under his spell but his power as a hostage taker was not a legitimate one, for he does not represent an alternative source of power in a dualistic universe. His function is rather one of gaoler and tormentor rather than as legal custodian, for a seducer has no right over property that belongs to someone else, and in this case humanity belongs to God; “How unjust it would be that he who seduced the other should deserve, as a result, to have any special right or authority over him.”³⁹² Furthermore, Satan cannot promise something for which he cannot deliver, namely Immortality. “Abelard concludes that the Devil did not acquire any rights over human beings simply because he successfully tempted them to disobey God. God may have given the Devil permission to torture human beings as punishment for their sins, but the Devil is only a jailer or licensed tormentor; he has no actual right over us, and God can withdraw us from the Devil’s power at any time without doing the Devil any injury at all.”³⁹³

Having rejected the idea that the Devil has any real sway over the soteriological equation, Abelard also dismisses the notion that God is some petulant feudal landlord that requires appeasement by way of satisfaction, in recognition of the honour due, in

³⁹¹ Weingart, 82.

³⁹² Abelard (Exp. in Epist. Ad Rom. II. iv. 834bc), cited in Weingart, 86.

³⁹³ Browner, J. & Guilfooy, K. (2004), *The Cambridge Companion to Abelard*, Cambridge University Press, 264.

order that he can be reconciled with his creatures. The shoe is definitely on the other foot: human beings are in need of reconciliation to God. “With a clear and discerning eye Abelard sees that it is man who needs to be restored to correct posture; man who has disrupted the divine intention and suffers a need for reconciliation, redemption, and liberation; man must be reconciled to God, not God to man. Abelard proclaims that God, who is essentially love, is eternally acting for man’s reconciliation.”³⁹⁴ Moreover, the whole notion that God demands payment for himself in the currency of his Son’s death is not only weird but unjust; “Indeed, how cruel and wicked it seems that anyone should demand the blood of an innocent person as the price for anything, or that it should in any way please him that an innocent man should be slain - still less that God should consider the death of his Son so agreeable that by it he should be reconciled to the whole world.”³⁹⁵ The attempted assassination of divinity in the act of homicide of the Son, as way of a payoff to God the Father, would only have exacerbated an already bad situation. If humanity owed a debt to God’s honour which had to be satisfied, then the death of Christ at the hands of human beings would only have made matters worse.³⁹⁶ God would understandably be more angered by such an act, for humanity would be even more culpable and held responsible for a far greater crime than before,³⁹⁷ and to balance this by claiming that God desires the murder of an innocent, in order to achieve redemption, is simply to add insult to injury. Thus, Abelard by clearing the decks of accepted and mainstream theories is thus free to explore other more fruitful lines of enquiry.

³⁹⁴ Weingart, 66.

³⁹⁵ Abelard (Exp. In Epist. Ad Rom. II. iii. 835c), cited in Weingart, 88.

³⁹⁶ Fiddes, Paul (2003), *The Christian Idea of the Atonement, Past Event & Present Salvation*, Darton Longman & Todd, London, 142.

³⁹⁷ As a matter of fact he calls Adam’s sin “a moderate transgression” in comparison with the individual and collected foulness of subsequent generations. See Weingart, 44.

To his critics this position seemed to court a heretical posturing, where it can be conjectured that if Christ did not come to release humanity from captivity to the Devil, the Cross is in effect evacuated of any coherent power.³⁹⁸ Arguably, the Crucifixion is reduced to merely that of an eloquent, but superfluous, demonstration of love; a love that can be admired and may even be imitated but one that does not objectively achieve much. “Abelard’s account of the redemption seems to William of St. Thierry and St Bernard to be even more alarming. Both quote from a report of his teaching, a so-called book of the sentences of Master Peter, in which Abelard seems to assert that Christ did not come to free humanity from any legitimate yoke of the Devil. If he denies that humanity was not rightfully held in captivity by the Devil, does that not render unnecessary the death of Christ on the Cross?”³⁹⁹ However, to understand Abelard’s position is to place an entirely different slant on the Redemptive drama. To demythologise and then emphasise the power of love is to recognise the human and divine aspects of the Incarnation, which reveal the capacity which both God and the human person has to love. The mystical or supernatural emphasis of love was traditionally found in the monastic cloisters with its heady spirituality, whilst Abelard appreciated a more earthy and virile version for which he had first-hand experience. “While there was much discussion at the time in monastic circles about the nature of love, as evident from the writings of William of St. Thierry and Bernard of Clairvaux, the emphasis here tended to be on divine love and the divine grace that made it possible for fallen humanity to perceive this transcendent love. Abelard, by

³⁹⁸ Although “after his condemnation he writes his *Confessio fidei*: ‘I confess that the only Son of God was Incarnated in order to liberate us from the servitude of sin and from the yoke of the Devil, and thus by His death to open for us the door of eternal life.’” Cited in Weingart, 137.

³⁹⁹ Mews, Constant, J. (2005), *Great Medieval Thinkers, Abelard and Heloise*, Oxford University Press, 10.

contrast, prefers to emphasize the natural capacity of the educated person to understand the nature of love.”⁴⁰⁰

Both positions recognised the profound capacity love had to induce transcendence and union with another. For monks, and St Bernard in particular whose ascetic practices suppressed any stirrings of sensuality,⁴⁰¹ pure love was a metaphysical ideal, and not one to be confused with human sexuality, despite the use of erotic language such as in his commentary on the *Song of Songs*. “Woe betide any monk or nun who confused divine or spiritual friendship with human love between the sexes. This was made clear by another distinguished Cistercian abbot, St Ailred of Rievaulx, who described with some approval how a nun of Watton in Yorkshire, had been made to castrate her lover in the presence of their nuns, and his bleeding testicles were then pushed into her mouth as a symbolic revenge for the violation of her chastity.”⁴⁰² St Bernard asked more delicately whether any of his monks had received the privileged and intimate mystical experience of a “Kiss from the mouth of Christ?” emphasising the supernatural dimension from which theology was undertaken within the cloister. On the other hand, the kisses that Abelard described are rather more down to earth, from the mouth of Heloise. This underscores the reality that Abelard was firstly a red-bloodied male, and secondly an intellectual and empiricist, rather than a mystic or ascetic. His source of learning flowed from books rather than any personal spiritual enlightenment.⁴⁰³ “Abelard was typical of scholastic intellectuals in seeing

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 175.

⁴⁰¹ “To Bernard sensual passion was the object of extreme disdain and dread. Even in his most susceptible youth, when he had felt an improper impulse suggested by the sight of a beautiful woman, he had plunged into a pool of ice-cold water, to freeze and drown the very sensibility to such a suggestion.” Storrs, Richard (2005), *Bernard of Clairvaux and his Controversy with Abelard*, Kessinger Publishing, 462.

⁴⁰² Constable, G., cited in Mews, 162.

⁴⁰³ Mews, 125.

Christianity not as a mysterious cult, but as a rational code of rules. Its lifeblood was logic, and not the visual and tactile attractions upon which the great Romanesque pilgrimage churches of Abelard's day depended."⁴⁰⁴

Yet despite Abelard being more of an academic than St Bernard, both were attempting to articulate that Christ came to show us how to love. The ascetic spirituality of the cloister was balanced for Bernard in the tender and exquisite art of the day. Romanesque and early Gothic styles ensured that any asceticism was warmed by the aesthetics of "powerful but tender crucifixion figures".⁴⁰⁵ Abelard however was all too human despite his intellectual brilliance, and satiated himself instead on the warmth of a physical embrace. Abelard's ardour was only held in check by his egotistical desire to protect his own reputation, and from the pages of the *Historia Calamitatum* (*The history of his misfortunes*) he sketches the indiscretions that finally propel him into religious life and the monastic state, for which he has no real inclination: "I must confess that in my misery it was the overwhelming sense of my disgrace rather than any ardour for conversion to the religious life that drove me to seek the seclusion of the monastic cloister."⁴⁰⁶ By his own admission he groomed Heloise, a young girl who required a tutor and because he "possessed such advantages of youth and comeliness, that no matter what woman I might favour with my love, I dreaded rejection of none". He went out of his way to seduce her where the lessons they embarked on became lessons of love; "Under the pretext of study we spent our hours in the happiness of love, and learning held out to us the secret opportunities that our passion craved. Our speech was more of love than of books which lay open before us; our kisses far outnumbered our reasoned words. Our hands sought less the book

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 118.

⁴⁰⁵ Clanchy, M. T. (1999), *Abelard, A Medieval Life*, M.T. Blackwell, Oxford & Cambridge USA, 287.

⁴⁰⁶ Abelard, Peter (2004), *Historia Calamitatum*, Kessinger Publishing. U.K., 17.

than each other's bosoms - love drew our eyes together far more than the lesson drew them to the pages of our text."⁴⁰⁷ Such was their passion, his own narrative describes their insatiable hunger for each other, where they drank greedily from the fountain of love, whilst trying to cover their tracks and conceal their affection. "In order that there might be no suspicion, there were indeed sometimes blows, but love gave them, not anger; they were the marks, not of wrath, but of tenderness surpassing the most fragrant balm in sweetness. What followed? No degree in love's progress was left untried by our passion, and if love itself could imagine any wonder as yet unknown, we discovered it. And our inexperience of such delights made us all the more ardent in our pursuit of them, so that our thirst for one another was still unquenched."⁴⁰⁸

As a result of this clandestine coupling, Heloise was spirited away under the cover of darkness, away from her guardian uncle, to Abelard's sister's house in Brittany where she gave birth to a son called Astrolabe. In an attempt to make amends, and also to save his own reputation, he offered to marry her if the bond could be kept secret. He then dispatched her to a convent of nuns at Argenteuil, not far from Paris, where she herself had been brought up and educated. This proved to be only a temporary inconvenience to their desire for each other, for "Abelard later recalls, he continued to enjoy sexual relations with her, even once in the refectory of Argenteuil during Holy Week."⁴⁰⁹ However, to place a wife in a convent was tantamount to a divorce,⁴¹⁰ which resulted in her enraged uncle and kinsman bribing one of his servants so as to break into his lodgings at night whilst he was asleep to seek revenge. "There they had vengeance on me with a most cruel and most shameful punishment, such as astounded

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Mews, 80.

⁴¹⁰ Clancy, 4.

the whole world; for they cut off those parts of my body with which I had done that which was the cause of their sorrow. This done straightaway they fled, but two of them were captured and suffered the loss of their eyes and their genital organs. One of these two was the aforesaid servant, who even while he was still in my service, had been led by his avarice to betray me.”⁴¹¹ This sense of disgrace from his enforced castration was an inducement for Abelard to retreat into monastic life, where he embarked not only on a theological career but also a literary correspondence with Heloise; the letters of which have become one of the most famous love stories in history. It is this experience which shaped and coloured his own atonement theology, albeit at times subliminally, that warrant it being acknowledged as forming an influential backdrop to his understanding of God’s revelation of love in the redemptive drama.

The letters of Abelard and Heloise

In Letter 5 to Heloise he acknowledges that his seduction of her was an abuse of his position, where he forced himself on her. “You know the depths of shame to which my unbridled lust had consigned our bodies, until no reverence for decency or for God even during the days of Our Lord’s Passion, or of the greater sacraments, could keep me from wallowing in this mire. Even when you were unwilling, and resisted to the utmost of your power and tried to dissuade me, as yours was the weaker nature I often forced you to consent with threats and blows. So intense were the fires of lust which bound me to you that I set those wretched, obscene pleasures, which we blush

⁴¹¹ Abelard, *Historia Calamitatum*, 15-16.

even to name, above God as above myself.”⁴¹² But for Heloise the conquest of love had been such a seminal experience that the rigour of the cloister had no effect of expunging its memory; indeed its aridity only added spice to the recollection of what she enjoyed with him, even in moments when sanctity should take precedence, she caved into sexual fantasy. “In my case, the pleasures of lovers which we shared have been too sweet - they cannot displease me, and can scarcely shift from my memory. Whenever I turn they are always there before my eyes, bringing with them awakened longings and fantasies, which will not even let me sleep. Even during the celebration of the Mass, when our prayers should be purer, lewd visions of those pleasures take such a hold upon my unhappy soul that my thoughts are on their wantonness instead of on my prayers. I should be groaning over the sins I have committed, but I can only sigh for what I have lost.”⁴¹³ Yet her love was also unselfish and unstinting having more the character of charity or *caritas* rather than anything hedonistic, for she desired only him. It was this purity of love for no particular gain or reward, other than to enjoy the object of her affection for its own sake that was the epistemological breakthrough for Abelard. He realized that love directed toward God must be of the same character and calibre of the love which God shows towards his creation, namely a pure love that is generous, free and lacking in any rapacious desire to control or possess. “She sought for nothing in Abelard save himself, desiring him only not anything of his. So far was her love free from any selfish desire for its own fulfilment that, in order to obey Abelard’s wish, she was willing to give up what her love alone desired, Abelard himself, and become a nun. Etienne Gilson was led by this passage

⁴¹² Abelard and Heloise (1974), *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, Penguin Classics, London, (Letter 5 to Heloise), 81.

⁴¹³ Abelard, 1974 (Letter 4. Heloise to Abelard), 81.

to suggest that Heloise was mainly responsible for inventing the theory of selfless love which Abelard then applied to man's love for God."⁴¹⁴

Heloise, however, was a reluctant nun, whose real love in life was the passionate affair she had with Abelard which was to haunt her for the rest of her life. Indeed she never let go of Abelard and never gave up on him, and it was this unconditional almost altruistic love, that was to demonstrate to Abelard the nature of *true* love. Abelard himself admitted that their relationship had taught him about the true nature of love: "Know that although love may be a universal thing, it has nevertheless been condensed into so confined a place that I would boldly assert that it reigns in us alone - that is, it has its very home in me and you. For the two of us have a love that is pure, nurtured, and sincere, since nothing is as sweet or carefree for the other unless it has mutual benefit."⁴¹⁵ Heloise, however, was unable to reconcile herself to the great injustice of her lover being cruelly robbed of his manhood which effectively terminated their union and discarded her into the frigidity of the cloister. "Heloise could play the part in public of the perfect nun precisely because her heart was dead; she was dead to the world, as every religious person should be. Abelard, on the other hand, who retained all his worldly ambitions despite becoming a monk, had a disastrously unstable monastic career, quarrelling with one monastery after another until he returned in the 1130's to his former life as master in the Paris schools."⁴¹⁶ Yet Abelard had a more pragmatic and survivalist outlook and attempted to make good his situation by embracing theological reflection and study, attempting to put behind him his relationship and its associated pleasures. Heloise on the other hand was unwilling or unable to deny herself that which had obviously been the most

⁴¹⁴ Marenbon, John (1999), *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard*, Cambridge University Press, 300.

⁴¹⁵ Mews, 68.

⁴¹⁶ Clanchy, 10.

authentic and profound of all experiences. It simultaneously chimed in with the courtly love movement of the day, and for this reason was too human, erotic and real to relinquish. “After they separated, Abelard and Heloise sublimated their love for each other in opposing ways. He directed his passion as well as his mind towards analysing the example of Christ, whose suffering on the Cross ‘as so bound us to Himself in love’ (in Abelard’s words) that ‘we will not fear to endure all things for His sake.’ Because Heloise would not - or could not accept the justice of Abelard’s castration, she could not turn to Christ for solace.”⁴¹⁷ Heloise had the honesty and directness to bluntly assert that “she was prouder to be his whore than the empress of Rome” and that she would willingly have followed him to Hell.⁴¹⁸

Abelard rejoined by trying to channel Heloise’s love for him and her outrage at his wounded masculinity for love of Christ instead, and in particular his suffering humanity. He tried to fix her gaze on the crucified one and encouraged her to see him as her true spouse. “Have this man always, sister, as your true spouse and the spouse of all the Church. Keep him in mind. Look at him going to be crucified for your sake, carrying his own Cross.”⁴¹⁹ And again he says: “To him, I beseech you, not to me, should be directed all your devotion, all your compassion, all your remorse. Weep for the injustice of the great cruelty inflicted on him, not for the just and righteous payment demanded of me.....Mourn for your Saviour and Redeemer, not for your corrupter and fornicator; wail for the Lord who died for you, not for the servant who lives and, indeed, for the first time is truly freed from death.”⁴²⁰ Abelard’s influence was such that his encouragement to Heloise to focus on the suffering Messiah meant

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 170.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 56.

⁴¹⁹ Abelard, 1974 (*Letter 5* Abelard to Heloise), 84.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 86.

that he was in the vanguard of a whole spiritual movement that concentrated on the agony of the Cross. It was his concern to elevate the love of Heloise onto a redemptive footing, that resulted in his development of the idea of transforming love being the primary chord that resonated from the life and death of Jesus. “In his commentary on St Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, Abelard came to describe Christ’s suffering and love in a new way because he was concerned about his own redemption. He had tried in his correspondence with Heloise to persuade her to join him in love and pity for the suffering Christ, and it seems to have been in this context that he first developed his ideas about redemption.”⁴²¹

Yet Heloise persisted in her fidelity to Abelard and pressed him in her correspondence to clarify the meaning of true love. In Letter 24 his solution to her frequent question is answered by his connecting a few phrases from Cicero and modifying them slightly, but revealing the rich fecundity of love as a transforming and unifying force. “Love is, therefore, a particular force of the soul, neither existing for itself nor content by itself, but always pouring itself into another with a certain hunger and desire, wanting to become one with the other, so that from two diverse wills one is produced without difference.”⁴²² Abelard’s monastic career by way of contrast was loveless, often chequered and plagued by conflict, acrimony and fear of attempts on his own life from his wayward monks. “The violence of my enemies I see in the danger to my body if I leave the cloister; but within it I am compelled incessantly to endure the crafty machinations as well as open violence of those monks who are called my sons, and who are entrusted to me as their abbot, which is to say their father. Oh, how often they have tried to kill me with poison, even as the monks sought to slay St

⁴²¹ Clanchy, 278.

⁴²² Mews, 67.

Benedict!”⁴²³ Whether these were actual attempts on his life or just a growing sense of paranoia and distrust with those in his charge is unclear. However, one influence in his life remained constant and steady, and it was this anchor in his soul, Heloise and her undying love that was the golden chain that led invisibly straight back to God and reflected most perfectly God’s love for humanity. “As a human being the most outstanding thing in his experience was the unselfish, passionate, disinterested love shown to him by Heloise. The characteristic thing in his theology was his emphasis on the unselfish love of God inflaming the soul with passionate disinterested love in return. The two cannot be unconnected....Abelard found God through his own human life story.”⁴²⁴ It is his relationship with Heloise, therefore, and his conviction that she should open her heart to the sufferings of Christ rather than to him that represents the germ of the idea of his redemption theory.⁴²⁵

Christ the revealer of divine love which is much more than mere exemplarism

It has been stated that Abelard’s reinterpretation of the redemption “contains one of the great new ideas of the twelfth century; it asserted that the Incarnation was efficacious, not in satisfying the just claims of God or the Devil, but in teaching by example the law of love. It left out the whole idea of compensation to God for human sin, and threw the whole emphasis of the Incarnation on its capacity to revive man’s love for God.”⁴²⁶ However, a common error in the reading of Abelard is to suppose that Jesus is merely showing us a good example, where the Incarnation can be

⁴²³ Abelard, *Historia Calamitatum*, 38.

⁴²⁴ Murray, Victor., cited in Hill, 246.

⁴²⁵ Clanchy, 286.

⁴²⁶ Southern, R.W., cited in Clancy, 286-87.

reduced to a project of education where Jesus is the celestial teacher,⁴²⁷ embodying and revealing wisdom Incarnate. His teaching and the illustration of his life in effect becomes an *illumination* where he is the heavenly guide that shows us how to lead an ethical life and ultimately the way back to heaven.⁴²⁸ Abelard also states clearly that Jesus teaches us by word and example even unto death, but only so we bind ourself to him more fully in love. “Through this unique act of grace manifested to us - in that his Son has taken upon himself our nature and preserved therein, teaching us by word and example, even unto death - he has more fully bound us to himself by love.”⁴²⁹ For this reason Abelard’s position has been caricatured as the “moral influence” or “exemplary theory” of the atonement. Abelard, however, reminds us that Jesus’ entire life has salvific overtones and not merely his death on the Cross, despite this being the ultimate consummation of a pattern of life already embraced. St Bernard was the first of many to criticise Abelard for promoting a mere exemplary view of the atonement. Bernard comments: “He holds and argues that it must be reduced just to this, that by his life and teaching (Jesus) handed down to men a pattern of life, that by his suffering and death he set up a standard of love. Did he then teach righteousness and not bestow it, reveal love and not infuse it?”⁴³⁰ Jesus then brings about what He teaches and promises; He is not offering some self-help theology, a decoded manual to liberation and salvation, rather He is the revealer of divine love. “The soteriological metaphors - Christ the Teacher and the Illuminator - are to be analysed under the rubric of ‘Christ the revealer of Divine love’, since His Incarnation and atonement

⁴²⁷ “He (Abelard) emphasises especially that Christ is the great Teacher and Example, who arouses responsive love in men; this love is the basis on which reconciliation and forgiveness rest.” Aulen, 112.

⁴²⁸ “The voluntary death of the innocent Son of God on Man’s behalf moves the sinner to gratitude and answering love and so to consciousness of sin, repentance, and amendment. I think, therefore, that the purpose and cause of the Incarnation was that he might illuminate the world by his wisdom and excite it to the love of himself.” Cited in Rashdall, 358.

⁴²⁹ Abelard (Exp. in Epist. Ad Rom. II. iii 836a), cited in Weingart, 121.

⁴³⁰ Bernard, *Letters*, 190, cited in Fiddes, 2003, 144.

graciously create Christians and introduce them into the Christian life. Jesus' life, ministry, and death thus present much more than a body of ethical precepts and examples for the believer."⁴³¹

With Abelard, we must ascertain how he perceives the divine encounter and restoration of humanity, from the point of contact with the Incarnation, to fully appreciate his position on the redemption. "The Incarnation is an act of love in its motive, a revelation of love in its particulars, a source of love in its consequences. Acting in love, the Son of God freely assumed a particular human nature that had no merit to deserve this role."⁴³² He accepts the premise of original sin, although there is a twist and variation of emphasis, where original sin means inherited punishment and not inherited or imputed guilt. Nonetheless humanity's position is such, that like Augustine, he acknowledges the state of alienation and wounded nature that the human person now has as a result of the Fall. "The divine-human relationship has been disrupted by man's initial and continual consent to evil. It is his integrity that is disordered, his nature that is vitiated, his will that is disoriented. Sin is contempt for God that alienates man from his loving creator and protector, but does not alienate God from men, in spite of the fact that it impairs the original channels of divine love."⁴³³ For Abelard, morality is always a matter of the heart, for sin is a matter for the soul; it is an interior, personal and deliberate intention to consent to some form of ethical evil. It is not so much the *act* that is judged by God but the *intention*. "Abelard is notorious for his contention that the Jews who killed Christ did not sin, because they did not consent to what they believed unfitting, but rather to what they

⁴³¹ Weingart, 126.

⁴³² Abelard (Exp. in Epist. ad Rom. I.i. 795ab, II.iv 841a.), cited in Weingart, 74-75.

⁴³³ Weingart, 88.

(mistakenly) thought would please God.”⁴³⁴ Indeed actions can even be morally neutral. He defines sin in the starkest and most simplistic terms as “contempt” for God where all sin is ultimately directed against God. “Intention alone determines God’s judgement of men. God judges only the soul, not the work. In sin the intention is evil; it is a conscious decision, a component of free, personal, deliberate consent to evil.”⁴³⁵ The emphasis is on personal responsibility and a radical interiorization of sin. The fallout from this situation is that humanity owes a debt of damnation, implying that they will have to endure the second death. They are still liable to eternal punishment imposed by God for the mistake of their first parents, even though they are not held personally responsible.⁴³⁶ Universal guilt is something that Abelard plays down which may account for the clerical backlash against him.

The wounded condition of human nature in disordered desire or concupiscence⁴³⁷ is, however, still passed on like some sexually transmitted disease. “Abelard reiterates the teaching of both Anselm of Laon and William of Champeaux that sin is transmitted to humanity through the carnal lust of sexual intercourse, but he differs from them in not seeing this as grounds for damnation. Lust is the consequence of original sin rather than sin itself. Through God’s mercy our sins are forgiven, and

⁴³⁴ “Nevertheless, if someone should ask whether the martyrs’ persecutors, or Christ’s, sinned in doing what they believed was pleasing to God, or whether without sin they could have given up what they thought shouldn’t be given up, then insofar as we earlier described sin to be scorn for God or consenting to what one believes shouldn’t be consented to, we certainly can’t say they were sinning. No one’s ignorance is a sin, and neither is the disbelief with which no one can be saved.” Abelard, Peter (1995), *Ethical Writings, Ethics & Dialogue Between a Philosopher, a Jew, & a Christian*, Hackett Publishing Company Inc. Indianapolis / Cambridge, 24.

⁴³⁵ Weingart, 63.

⁴³⁶ “The Christian surprises the Philosopher by concluding that the greatest evil for men is not the punishment of Hell but the ever-increasing hate they will feel there for God, and their greatest good the highest love for God.” Marenbon, 298.

⁴³⁷ “Abelard emphasizes the objective side of the dominion of sin: ‘The debt of damnation by which we are bound, since we are made liable to eternal punishment’ (Comm. Rom. 171). But there is a subjective side as well. Our desires are disordered by sin, so that we cannot effectively will that we know is good. The passion somehow sets us free, so that we no longer have to obey the promptings of concupiscence.” Browner, J. & Guilfooy, K. (2004), *The Cambridge Companion to Abelard*, Cambridge University Press, 267.

punishment in the life to come is lifted.”⁴³⁸ This stay of execution of the death sentence against humanity is revoked through God’s intervention, not through some exchange or substitution but more through solidarity in love, where the gates of paradise are opened. “And from sin, that is, from the punishment for sin that He bore for us in the flesh - in the humanity He had assumed, and not according to His divinity - He destroyed sin, i.e. He took away from us the punishment for sin by which even the righteous were bound before, and He opened the gates of heaven.”⁴³⁹ The motive for God intervening in this situation is in its simplest form one of love. “The motive of God’s restitution of the broken bonds of the divine-human relationship is divine love, and that redemption finds its ground and expression in the person and work of Jesus Christ.”⁴⁴⁰ The Incarnation then is the start of a process of liberation and restoration which climaxes on the Cross. The entire movement of the salvation drama fleshed out in the person of Jesus is characterised as love, and one which breaks the bonds of slavery to sin. “God is moved by love to redeem men from their sinfulness because it is of His essence to love; He is moved to receive man into fellowship of love in the time of grace; He is moved by love to instil in the elect that love which removes the barriers of sin, restores man’s integrity, and enables Him to turn to God in responsive love.”⁴⁴¹ This is achieved not just through a transformation of intention; a change of heart in individuals after witnessing the life and sacrifice of Christ which somehow brings on lookers back on track, otherwise the charge of exemplarism against Abelard would hold. Nonetheless, he reminds us that the whole christological package is necessary.⁴⁴²

⁴³⁸ Abelard (Comm. Rom. 2.), cited in Mews, 191-192.

⁴³⁹ Abelard (Comm. Rom. 21.), cited in Browner, 266.

⁴⁴⁰ Weingart, 66.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 71.

⁴⁴² “Now it seems to us that we have been justified by the blood of Christ and reconciled to God in this way: through this unique act of grace manifested to us - in that his Son has taken upon himself our

Abelard brings into focus that Jesus' entire life, as well as His death, is crucial as a manifestation of the love of God, and for this reason His whole life should be viewed as a panoramic sweep of soteriological significance. "Abelard put the emphasis back on the whole of Christ's life, not just its tragic end. The message of his death is no different than the message of his life: He came to instruct us in God's love and to inspire us towards receptivity of God's grace."⁴⁴³ The trajectory of God's passage through our realm in the Incarnate form of the Son, is not so much to leave clear footprints as markers to show us how to get out of the bog and mire of our fallen state, but rather a declaration of love that flows from God and back to God. "The whole life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ displays the cycle of emanation and return. The Son of God is Incarnate in the world as the concrete, personal manifestation of the redemptive diffusion of the *Summum bonum*;⁴⁴⁴ his teaching and sacrifice are God's seeking; His Resurrection and ascension are his return to God with those whom He has redeemed."⁴⁴⁵ The impact that the Incarnation has is obviously one that is intended to influence the status quo and for all time thereafter. Jesus is not meant to be some accidental tourist who is merely passing through, but one who is destined by design to change everything, including people's hearts. "The purpose of the Incarnation had been to impart to men sweetness and light by the instruction of Christ, and to quicken their souls by the contact with them of this Divine temper. His theory of the Atonement was, as I have said, that it was needed and intended to enkindle in us such love toward God as should effectually incline us to do His will, and make us

nature and preserved therein teaching us by word and example even unto death - he has more fully bound us to himself by love; with the result that our hearts should be enkindled by such a gift of divine grace, and true charity should not now shrink from enduring anything for him." (Abelard, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*, 283.) Gwenfair M. Walters, cited in Hill, 245.

⁴⁴³ Finlan, 75.

⁴⁴⁴ The highest good.

⁴⁴⁵ Weingart, 68.

ready for suffering and service in His cause.”⁴⁴⁶ Yet the imitation of Christ is not meant simply to be taken as a template for martyrdom. Christ’s life as an embodiment of God’s love should be practised in its ethical dimension. It is, however, the revelatory capacity of Jesus’ mission, and in particular the Incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection that represent the summits of God’s self-declaration and disclosure of who He is. “The Passion should not be thought of merely as an example to emulate. It is the event that above all others reveals to us the nature, the supreme and unstinting love, of God Himself. By showing us how much God deserves to be loved - not merely because of what He has done for us, but because of who He is. Abelard exclaims, ‘Oh that we might have such pure affection for God that we would love Him insofar as He is good in Himself rather than insofar as He is useful to us!’”⁴⁴⁷

The Cross as a ladder of perfection

The strongest accusation against Abelard’s position vis-à-vis an atonement theory is that it is all too subjective. The Cross itself can even be bypassed as an optional extra, for if Jesus only came to show us love and how to love, albeit with divine potency, the death of Christ even on a Cross can seem superfluous. “Unless the Passion actually accomplishes something, unless there is an ‘objective transaction’ made in and through the death of Christ, there is nothing about the Passion to inspire our love: pity, perhaps, or sympathy, but not love or gratitude.”⁴⁴⁸ The Passion has to reveal or achieve more, otherwise the connection with Christ’s death and humanity’s salvation is merely accidental. It would seem that the twin pitfalls of adopting a moral exemplarist viewpoint and an allied Pelagianist position, of ruggedly getting to

⁴⁴⁶ Storrs, 48.

⁴⁴⁷ Abelard (Comm. Rom., 204.), cited in Browner, 275.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 262.

heaven under one's own steam, cannot be avoided. However, Abelard, like other theologians is not so dogmatic or clear on how the atonement is appropriated. On closer inspection this acquisition of love, which results in the perfectibility of the human condition and the restoration of the image of God, is achieved as a gift of grace and cooperation with that gift. For Abelard the Cross is not a redundant instrument but a tool or ladder of perfection which we use to climb. "He himself is the way whereby the faithful pass from exile to their own country. He too has set up the Cross, from which he summons us, as a ladder for us to use. On this, for you, the only begotten Son of God was killed; he was made an offering because he wished it. Grieve with compassion over him alone and share his suffering in your grief."⁴⁴⁹ The steps that are taken are steps in love and solidarity with the suffering one, and what is dispensed as a result is grace, or God's life, experienced as love. "Abelard's theory of love is designed, like that of his contemporaries, to explain the nature of charity. Abelard considered charity to be a disposition, not a particular act. His theory of love is therefore concerned with the nature of the disposition to love God in the right way."⁴⁵⁰

God loves us first, and always makes the first move in taking the initiative in the solution to redemption. "There is one way in which the Passion is obviously distinctive. It involves not merely the offer of happiness but an actual concrete step taken by God to secure our happiness. It therefore excites not only desire but gratitude."⁴⁵¹ However, it is not just about evoking our gratitude, it is far more, a reaching out with a desire to pull us up by equipping us with the tackle to make the ascent ourselves aided with grace. Yet this drawing us to Himself in friendship is not

⁴⁴⁹ Abelard, 1995 (*Letter 5* Abelard to Heloise), 85.

⁴⁵⁰ Abelard, 1995, 288.

⁴⁵¹ Browner, 274.

imposed or violently thrust upon us. “God seeks man in his predicament to draw him by grace to fellowship. In this seeking and drawing, God is patient, for in His love he never acts violently to negate man’s essential nature, even when it is distorted by sin. Although man, perverted by sin, judges God’s patience to be a weakness and thus despises and rejects His invitation, God is not to be rebuffed, he continually moves towards man in order to attract Him to Himself.”⁴⁵² God gives us grace to achieve this, although grace should not be seen as some sort of steroid injection or celestial juice to propel us along, it is in fact no thing at all other than God’s action on the human heart;⁴⁵³ for love transforms and really changes us constitutionally. It is a gift from first to last but significantly has the capacity to spill over from the heart of God, in surplus, and become abundantly, and infectiously, infused into our own hearts.

“The love exhibited in the Incarnation and death of Jesus Christ is creative, transforming love. It first acts to restore the inner life of man, which sin has alienated from God and neighbour. Abelard calls it a gift of divine grace, because the recipient does nothing to merit it and because it is substantive, a new quality of life that is infused in the heart of man by God.”⁴⁵⁴ This new found desire recognises that God alone can grant us eternal happiness, yet the motive we should have, ought to be like Christ’s, pure and unselfish. We should not cling to God out of desire for reward or fear of damnation. “God gives us grace by offering us eternal happiness, and we do his will because we want what he offers. But the passion was supposed to enable us to serve God because we love God for His own sake and not because we fear

⁴⁵² Weingart, 60.

⁴⁵³ “The process of redemption does not take its rise in our contemplation of Christ. The awakening point of the Christian life is the discovery of what Christ has done for us.” Taylor, Robert. O.P. “Was Abelard an Exemplarist?” *Theology* 31 (1935), 213.

⁴⁵⁴ Abelard (Exp. in Epist. ad Rom. II. iii. Ibid., 859a), cited in Weingart, 125.

punishment or desire reward.”⁴⁵⁵ The image of God is restored in the human person and they are Justified and made righteous and brought back into right relationship to God. The infusion of God’s love has a medicinal and antiseptic quality which wipes out sin and heals the individual with a new orientation for ethical action. “The particular appropriate aspect of God’s saving activity, comprehensive of this, is the infusion of divine love in the unregenerate hearts of sinners. It also consists in the removal of the obstacle of sin that places man at enmity with God, and with man’s response in faith in Christ as saviour. God infuses the gift of grace to reconstruct and reorient the diseased and disordered spiritual life of the sinner.”⁴⁵⁶

Bernard of Clairvaux vigorously combated Abelard’s position in his *Letter to Pope Innocent Concerning Certain Heresies of Peter Abelard*. He assumed that he had adopted a position where the Passion was a unique example of God’s love alone, where nothing objective is happening (no payment of a ransom to deliver us from the power of the Devil, no satisfaction made to restore God’s honour) only a change of heart which is awakened within us as a result of contemplating the crucified one. Naturally from this exemplarist viewpoint logically flows the Pelagian idea that divine grace is neither necessary to act well, *or* required to reach paradise. Abelard, according to Bernard, “makes the glory of our redemption and the pinnacle of our salvation consist, not in the power of the Cross or the price of Christ’s blood, but in the improvement of our own way of life”.⁴⁵⁷ Yet Abelard is clearly not saying this.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁵ Browner, 274.

⁴⁵⁶ Abelard (Exp. in Epist. ad Rom. II. iii. 832c.), cited in Weingart, 124.

⁴⁵⁷ Browner, 259.

⁴⁵⁸ “In answer to the charge of Pelagianism pressed against him by his enemies Abelard offers a simple statement: ‘I confess the grace of God is necessary for all and that without it neither a natural faculty nor free will is sufficient for salvation. Grace certainly anticipates us so that we may will, then follows so that we are able, and finally joins with us so that we may persevere. Grace is primarily in the ontological order as the sole foundation of God’s act of redemption, and in the order of salvation as *gratia preveniens*.’” Weingart, 181.

He does however acknowledge that although grace is offered to all in a prevenient fashion, how exactly individuals respond and cooperate with that grace is largely up to them, either way their *will* has to be engaged. “Abelard argues that God offers His grace to all, but that we differ in how we respond to that grace. One person, perhaps meagre in resources, may be kindled by desire for the kingdom of heaven, while someone else, perhaps physically more capable, is driven by laziness. What matters is always their inner intention, one’s will.”⁴⁵⁹ This focus on individuality has been seen as a weakness in presentation, but without lurching towards a position of full-blown *apokatastasis* (universal redemption and restoration), this cannot be avoided.

Admittedly, the strength of Abelard’s position is that he has realigned as of central importance the whole life of Jesus and His teaching, avoiding the idea that Jesus was born merely to die. His whole life is in fact a pattern of love that reaches its conclusion and crescendo on the Cross. Arguably some have suggested that this cuts the Cross down to a mere gesture or symbol rather than a totemic mechanism of salvation through love. “Although he does include Jesus’ death as part of what moves us to love, he does not explain why Jesus’ death on the Cross was necessary. It appears his atonement model could function logically without the Cross.”⁴⁶⁰ Abelard by shifting the ground and seeing the bigger picture meant that he was vulnerable to being seen as out of step with the spirituality and pious practices of his day. “The fact that he attached no special significance to the death of Christ was sufficient of itself to make his teaching unacceptable to an age which was laying ever greater stress on the death, both in theology and devotion.”⁴⁶¹ Others, however, have stressed that the mere sacrificial act of laying one’s life down for others is indeed a potent enough gesture,

⁴⁵⁹ Mews, 193.

⁴⁶⁰ Green, 139.

⁴⁶¹ Aulen, 113.

rooted in love,⁴⁶² to generate a conversion experience and a reformation of life in the believer. “Whatever were men’s theories about the grounds on which the death of Christ became necessary, it was the love exhibited by Christ in submitting to that death which has really moved the heart, touched the conscience, and regenerated the life of believers.”⁴⁶³ Moreover, others have pointed out the need for repentance is not stressed by Abelard and his down-playing of universal guilt has promoted the conclusion that sin is not such a big obstacle in Abelard’s soteriological equation. It looks suspiciously as if the human person has a greater capacity for perfectibility and self-advancement than they should have. Indeed Green and Baker comment: “Abelard displays overconfidence in the human capacity to bring about our salvation. He assumes that, awakened by the example of God’s love, we can arrive to a point of living righteously. Sin appears as a relative and surmountable barrier for Abelard in contrast to an absolute and insurmountable barrier in the other explanation.”⁴⁶⁴

The Cross as a Sacrament of God’s Grace

Yet all these authors have missed the fundamental corrective and referent that Abelard employs to demonstrate that the Cross holds a strategic and central place in the theatre of salvation. It is here, on the Cross that God so eloquently not only reveals His essence and true nature of love for us (*pro nobis*), but also our participation in that process of redemption which is clearly as an unmerited gift. The Cross is the ultimate peak, the loftiest and most sublime high point of the whole of Jesus’ salvific career that manifests and triggers a surge of divine grace. “Abelard concludes his sermon on the Cross with the singular declaration that this unparalleled manifestation of love

⁴⁶² “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13.

⁴⁶³ Rashdall, 360.

⁴⁶⁴ Green, 139.

effects our salvation. Because it is not of our own power to accept the chalice of salvation, that is, to share by suffering in the passion of Jesus and by carrying our own cross to follow him, He himself grants this to us by his grace, by which we are redeemed.”⁴⁶⁵ The Cross then, is not an added extra, a piece of soteriological top spin for effect alone, but a Sacrament of who God is, a sign of love that brings about the grace that it refers to; After which “everyone is made more righteous, that is, more loving towards God, after the passion of Christ than he had been before, because a realized gift incites greater love than that which is only hoped for. Therefore, our redemption through Christ’s suffering is that supreme love in us which not only frees us from slavery to sin, but also acquires for us the true liberty of sons of God.”⁴⁶⁶ The language that is used here, such as “acquires for us” and “incites”, demonstrates that Abelard is of the mind that the revelation of God’s love in the Crucifixion has a redemptive impact which *itself* generates a transformation in the anthropological state of the human person, and cannot simply be reduced to a matter of imitating Christ alone. It is the demonstration of God’s love which is simultaneously restorative, and so to all intents and purposes an objective act. The main point that Abelard’s critics have missed, and as a consequence minimised and satirised his position, is the failure to appreciate the dynamic role that grace has in his atonement theory, the very power of God’s love.

It is God alone who acts on the soul and brings about our salvation. We can achieve nothing without Him and give Him back nothing which was not already His own. Grace, in true Augustinian fashion is free and unmerited and necessary to heal and restore that which was wounded, helping us on our way. As Abelard states: “Certainly

⁴⁶⁵ Abelard (Sermo xii 484ab.), cited in Weingart, 123.

⁴⁶⁶ Abelard (Romans, II. 3:26.), cited in Fiddes, 2003, 143-142.

He is the one who works in us both to will and to act for the sake of a good will. He anticipates us so that we may will, he follows us so that we are able, and He assists that will which he inspires lest it be deficient. He freely gives that will by which we merit, and He rewards the merits themselves which He has caused in us. For He rewards nothing in us except his own gifts; thus neither merit nor reward is of us but from him to us.”⁴⁶⁷ Grace is, however, never imposed. God does not ride roughshod over freewill for no one is ever press-ganged into Paradise. The characteristic of love is that its touch is delicate and light, and here grace and love are synonymous. God like a true lover invites and desires a response where the individual is invited to work synergistically with God for their own salvation, which at its most basic involves nothing more than yielding to divine love. “Grace would not be grace if it were to violate man’s integrity; God would not be love if His power were so irresistible that it crushed human personality. Abelard thus safeguards human responsibility by his synergism; man may co-operate with God’s subsequent grace to merit the reward of eternal life.”⁴⁶⁸ The individual is accountable in the sense that love always demands an answer, how should one respond? Love cannot be forced but it always requires a response. The Cross is thus not a histrionic gesture of surplus love, a saturated moment of passion, but a fitting conclusion to a life lived in love, where even in death love is embraced in the belief that it is stronger than the extinguishing grasp of the grave. In any event, love can be experienced for what it is; it is not just a novel idea or a metaphysical ideal. “Man cannot know the depth of divine love unless he experiences the benefits of that love. The life and death of Jesus Christ would have no revelatory significance or redemptive power *pro nobis* if men did not receive the

⁴⁶⁷ Abelard (Sermo v. 425), cited in Weingart, 182.

⁴⁶⁸ Weingart, 183.

atoning efficacy of that life and death; as he experiences salvation, man knows that God is love.”⁴⁶⁹

The Incarnation which is the most significant outcrop of God’s love and wisdom has the capacity to transform the world from within. God stands shoulder to shoulder with humanity in an act of soteriological solidarity; particularly on the Cross, going further than any one has before, even to Hell and back. God’s love is infinite and it is at the lowest point of human existence, death, where God’s love intervenes and is most apparent. Jesus is neither simply our representative, nor substitute, but the transaction that takes place on the Cross is a dialogue of love. God demonstrates that he reaches out and rescues potentially all persons from the brink of annihilation, where the second death can no longer do harm. “The exhibition of divine love in the Incarnate Logos is man’s justification, restoration in the *imago dei*, instruction in the Christian life, and the deliverance from sin, fear and the Devil; it is his adoption as one of the sons of God, and endows him with authentic liberty.”⁴⁷⁰ The act of atonement encompasses the whole sweep of Christ’s redemptive career which climaxes on the Cross disclosing a love which has the power to transform that which it touches. The Cross is like a pebble that is cast into the waters of history, where the ripples fan out in all directions and at times swamping all that it touches in a tide of love. Love is infused in those who respond to this love. “The disclosure of divine love is tantamount to salvation for those who receive God’s revelation in faith, hope and love.... This manifestation of love is one which works the miracle of spiritual transformation in the life of the recipient, by joining him to God and neighbour in an

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 123.

⁴⁷⁰ Abelard (Exp. in Epist. ad Rom. II. iv. 859a.), cited in Weingart, 124.

indissoluble bond of affection.”⁴⁷¹ Abelard’s soteriology obviously has a theocentric emphasis for it is always God’s love energising and transforming. The power of love ensures that the depth of penetration is not just psychological or ethical but results in the total transformation of the human person from the inside out; fitting them for their eternal destiny which is nothing less than the beatific vision.

Abelard indicates that it is the presence of the Holy Spirit within the believer that is the dynamic principle that brings about this regeneration, equipping the individual in the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. The work from first to last is always God. For, “in the logic of divine love salvation is a work of God, from his self-determination to reveal himself in Jesus Christ for man’s redemption to the gracious application of Christ’s benefits to sinners by the Holy Spirit; Man’s regeneration is the particular office of the Holy Spirit consonant with his special property of love.”⁴⁷² The human person is justified⁴⁷³ and made righteous before God. Their sins are pardoned and their status changed, where he or she are no longer in a state of alienation but communion with their creator as sons and daughters of God. The Passion fits us to receive fulfilment and happiness which is nothing other than God himself, which in turn make us more capable of responding with charity.⁴⁷⁴ This is the power of love, it is the motive behind God’s salvation, it dictates the pattern of the divine activity in creation, providence, and redemption until all is in all. ⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷¹ Abelard (Exp. in Epsit.ad Rom. II. iii 832b.), cited in Weingart, 124.

⁴⁷² Weingart, 151-152.

⁴⁷³ “Justification means renewal through the infusion of love, forgiveness of sin, life in the Spirit, and reconciliation with God. Abelard stands in the mainstream of the medieval Augustinian tradition, interpreting justification primarily as renewal. For Augustine justification is the recreation of the sinner through the gradual transformation into a new being with the infusion of love.” Weingart, 156.

⁴⁷⁴ Browner, 275.

⁴⁷⁵ Colossians 3:11.

Abelard's own life journey was a love affair with Heloise which changed him beyond measure; the intensity and passion of which was a foretaste of that which could most sublimely and exquisitely be experienced through God's revelation of love. Heloise never gave up on Abelard and her fidelity and memory was to warm him and steady him for the rest of his life. It was this earthy, erotic, and self-giving experience that was to give him the profound insight that the very nature and activity of God in the atonement is one solely of love. Transforming love is, therefore, one of the premier soteriological models of the atonement, for what is played out in the arena of salvation history, is nothing less than the world's greatest love affair between God and humanity. The Cross is the summit and meeting point of Heaven and Hell where love conquers all. Heloise's love was a sacrament of the love of God for Abelard; their human love a reflection and participation in the very celestial fount from which all love flows. "For love shows the characteristic of new wine, which fermenting as it is born and by wantonness as it ages, bubbles up and overflows unable to contain itself, always seething and fermenting with fresh affections."⁴⁷⁶

Fittingly, before Abelard dies, where he languishes in a monastery virtually under house arrest for his turbulent theological career, his gaze is always fixed even at a distance on the object of his love, a love which taught him everything. Peter the Venerable writes: "An immense lime-tree long stood in the grounds of the convent, under which, according to a persistent tradition, he whose sun was now fast descending in the west used to sit for hours, silently meditating, with his face always turned toward the site of the Paraclete, in which Heloise had her home among her

⁴⁷⁶ Hoyland, Gilbert (1978), *Sermons of a 12th Century English Cistercian. Echoes of RB 72*. Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo.

nuns.”⁴⁷⁷ Abelard’s terrestrial and theological passions converge and harmonise in the duplex desire of his heart. Heloise dwells in the convent of the Holy Spirit, an earthly and heavenly love that both demonstrate in their own unique but not dissimilar ways, the absolute power of love. Through all this, the sheer gratuity and gifted element of love shines through, which has the capacity to restore hope and liberate. Abelard learnt that true love was not only transforming but sacrificial in character. It is linked to God’s essence⁴⁷⁸ and in itself invites and communicates the fullness of life. Abelard uncovered the secret of redemption that love is the motive that lies behind the atonement.⁴⁷⁹ However, divinity enters our realm not simply to teach lessons in love, as a sort of sublime role model, but to radically purify, heal, ransom and redeem. Jesus, motivated by extreme love, takes on the sins of the world to dissipate their toxic load, transporting them (as the archetypal scapegoat) away from the heart of the community. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”⁴⁸⁰ It is Jesus’ action that mysteriously exposes the root problem that lurks under the surface of community life and culture; its incessant self-destructive urge and appetite for violence and the sacrificial mentality of scapegoating, the opposite behaviour to true love and *caritas*. Jesus embraces this mechanism only to break it once and for all,⁴⁸¹ thereby demonstrating that God’s ways are fundamentally different from humanity’s. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord.”⁴⁸² It is to the crucified scapegoat and the work of René Girard that we must now turn.

⁴⁷⁷ Storrs, 499.

⁴⁷⁸ 1 John 4:8.

⁴⁷⁹ Romans 5:5-8.

⁴⁸⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:21.

⁴⁸¹ “Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with the blood not his own; for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” Hebrews 9:25-26. See also: Hebrews 10:11-14.

⁴⁸² Isaiah 55:8.

Chapter 5. The Crucified Scapegoat

The Cross of Jesus may be the paramount religious symbol of salvation, and crucifixes may adorn the walls of churches throughout the Catholic world, even being appropriated as fashion accessories or jewellery, but underneath lurks the more sinister reminder that the Cross is fundamentally an instrument of violence and execution. One may as well have in its place a graphic symbol of the guillotine, the hangman's noose or even a Kalashnikov. The Cross will always remind us that whatever hermeneutic is utilised to unpack it of its salvific significance, it exposes an anthropology rooted in violence, which through the mechanism of sacrifice is even projected almost magically into the realm of the divine. Paradoxically, it is this sacrificial act of sacred violence that is exposed in the Bible as one that God *endures* only so as to side with the innocent victim. "Sacrifice is a kind of magician's practice, where violence is the essential act, but in the representation of the event one's eyes are always directed elsewhere at the moment the axe falls. Above all, what is typically hidden is the view and voice of the victim as a victim. But the Bible tells us with staggering bluntness that the violence is the magic. The power is in the blood."⁴⁸³

The Cross may be legitimately interpreted as a sacrifice⁴⁸⁴ but ironically it is the death of Jesus that illuminates the reality of sacrifice as a piece of failed technology. The

⁴⁸³ Heim, Mark S. (2006), *Saved From Sacrifice, a Theology of the Cross*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 16.

⁴⁸⁴ 'Sacrifice' for René Girard has three possible permutations: It refers firstly to the ritual immolation of a human or animal victim. Secondly, in its positive sense, primarily in the case of Christ, as the willingness to give of oneself to others and to commit oneself to God, not for sadomasochistic purposes but out of love and faithfulness to the other; and thirdly, if retained at all, sacrifice should be understood as having its basis in radical faith in a loving God, who does not strike a secret deal with his Son that calls for his murder in order to satisfy some sense of divine wrath or justice. See: Girard, René

functionality of the crucified one is to expose the myth that God desired the handing over of his Son, in the bloodiest manner possible, as a forensic substitute to make good a warped interpretation of divine justice. Instead, “the death of Jesus set in motion a very concrete historical effect, the unveiling and undermining of sacrifice. Christ died for us, to save us from what killed him. And what killed him was not God’s justice but our redemptive violence. He stepped in between our violence and our victims, and has been a haunting presence there ever since.”⁴⁸⁵ The lingering anthropological legacy of the Cross is one that demonstrates God’s solidarity with victims and exposes the mechanism of violence which is used against them as a defunct but ubiquitous practice found operative in all cultures. Communities all too often employ the technique of the scapegoat⁴⁸⁶ to project and dispel the self-generated evil from within its own midst. Ironically, it is the practice of scapegoating itself, often dressed up in sacrificial rites, that is sin-ridden as it cunningly obscures the reality of the victim, who in the process is transmuted into a guilty party or even divinized. “Scapegoating is one of the deepest structures of human sin, built into our religion and our politics. It is demonic because it is endlessly flexible in its choice of prey and because it can truly deliver the good that it advertises. The sacrificial dynamic is most effective where it is most invisible. Victims are called criminals, gods, or both. So long as we are in the grip of the practice, we do not see our victims as victims.”⁴⁸⁷

(2003), *The Reader*, Edited By James Williams, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York. 292-293.

⁴⁸⁵ Heim, 306.

⁴⁸⁶ “If we were willing to acknowledge the real source of our insight into social violence, we often say that these victims are *scapegoats*. We use this word not in the ritual sense of Leviticus but in the everyday modern sense which is much more interesting, the sense of a victim unjustly persecuted by a semi-conscious or unconscious group of human beings.” Girard, 2003, 201.

⁴⁸⁷ Heim, 64.

In this chapter I will seek to demonstrate that violence lurks at the heart of every culture, being truly characteristic of the human condition and that it is the violent impulse of human beings that pins Jesus to the Cross; and it is this violent act of redemption that is in fact man-made, profanely generated and *not* God given. This demystification of sacrifice will be uncovered as I explore the cultural construct that is endemic to most communities, being discovered and articulated by the French philosopher and literary critique René Girard, in his ground-breaking thesis on the relationship between “violence and the sacred”. The scapegoat mechanism that religious rites harness, through the paraphernalia of sacrifice, is in effect a channel to discharge or safely expel this violence out from the ranks of community. Girard’s ethnological, psychological and cultural analysis of myths and literature allows us to see Jesus, as portrayed in the Gospels, as the innocent victim, the crucified scapegoat. Jesus brings deliverance but only by exposing the practice of sacrifice, showing us that the toxic by-product of death on a Cross is in fact a poison chalice and not a healing balm. For the Passion is the “divine act revealing, reversing, and replacing our redemptive violence, which we so long and tenaciously hid from ourselves in the very name of the sacred. When our sin had so separated us from God and built our peace on blood, God was willing to come and die for us, to bear our sin and suffer the condemnation that we visit upon our victims and so deserve ourselves. God saved us from our form of reconciliation, healed us of our dependence on that sad medicine.”⁴⁸⁸ The anthropological role of the Cross effectively undermines the structures of sacred violence and shows the world that it is possible to live without them. Nevertheless, it is necessary to ask ourselves is violence indeed the root of all culture? and does religion, and in particular the Christian revelation, expose this and

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 329.

present the secular world with an effective soteriological means of dealing with these violent origins of humanity?

Christian anthropology points to the fundamental dignity of the human being as a creature made in the image of God but a creature that is nonetheless still in the process of becoming. The human person is a complex synthesis of the temporal and eternal, the finite and infinite, body and spirit, compulsion and freedom. The individual is always confronted by the choice of becoming the sort of person God has created them to be, but this requires the possibility and openness to the future. The creatureliness of the human being dictates that we are locked into an ongoing process of formation and creation. There is no fixed psychological state but a continuous striving for existence or being.⁴⁸⁹ This in itself can generate a negative slipstream of anxiety, fear or *angst*⁴⁹⁰ that is unique to the human condition and separates us from other animals through the sheer possibility of becoming something other than we are. “Human beings, lacking a set psychology, are free, which means that we are aware of possibilities open to us. We can shape the future through our choice of actions. It is out of this capability that angst arises. Freedom, which entails an awareness of future possibilities, constitutes an element of human nature that animals lack, an element that needs to be named: *spirit*.”⁴⁹¹ The philosopher Soren Kierkegaard⁴⁹² isolated this angst ridden phenomenon as an indicator of the alienated state of human beings vis-à-vis God and the world. It is this empirical angst itself that has the potential to generate

⁴⁸⁹ “For human beings, the event of creation is not experienced as a completed action, but as a present reality. We do not simply exist, we are continually coming into existence - an awkward and uncomfortable position that can lead to negative consequences.” Bellinger K. Charles (2001), *The Genealogy of Violence. Reflections on Creation, Freedom, and Evil*, Oxford University Press, 37.

⁴⁹⁰ “Angst as a uniquely human emotion, which involves the related fated concepts of (entangled) freedom, guilt, and the future development of the self.” Bellinger, 38.

⁴⁹¹ Bellinger, 36.

⁴⁹² AD 1813-55.

violence because it has its roots thrust deep into original sin. Angst is only possible because the human person is spirit as well as matter, but the psychological way in which individuals manage or seek to control this angst can be legitimate, either cooperating with God in creation, or result in actions that seek to cover up or violently eliminate this state of being. "The nature of original sin has often been explained, and still a primary category has been lacking - it is angst; this is the essential determinant. Angst is a desire for what one fears, a sympathetic antipathy: angst is an alien power which grips the individual, and yet one cannot tear himself free from it and does not want to, for one fears, but what he fears he desires."⁴⁹³

Angst is a reminder of our incompleteness and possible future salvation

The individual desires God but fears the letting go and radical conversion that is necessary in order to reorientate one's life to the extramundane. Sin is not a leap of faith but a leap into the self where the over-riding motivation is ego protection to resist the pull or openness to the future and God. Sin is an attempt to cancel out the angst within, cushion its discomfort and evade spiritual maturity. "Sin thus entails a hardening of the individual's psychological structure; the ego becomes a kind of 'shell' within which the individual hides in an attempt to evade the possible further development of the self. In this state, the self seeks to protect itself from the future, that is, it continually seeks to fend off the possibility that it could 'die to itself' and be reborn in a different, more mature formation."⁴⁹⁴ Angst is a genuine state of spiritual turmoil, the motor that drives the individual towards the ever receding supernatural existential horizon that is God. Angst is essentially a reminder of incompleteness and

⁴⁹³ Kierkegaard, Søren, *Journal and Papers I-VII* 94 (1842) cited in Bellinger, 37.

⁴⁹⁴ Bellinger, 53.

lack of fulfilment and spiritual integration, it points to wholeness to come. It is more optimistically an indicator that salvation is a future possibility. Those who seek to suppress that ache of incompleteness seek to smother angst by muffling its presence and listening not to the call of God but the voice of the narcissistic ego turned inward. “Notice here the acoustic metaphor that is central to Kierkegaard’s anthropology. The demonic insists on listening only to itself, it must close itself off from the voice of God, because that voice is the Word of creation. Even though the voice of creation is a quiet voice, it calls with a persistent, subtle invitation that puts pressure on the individual (pressure to move forward through the experience of angst). From the perspective of the demonic ego, this invitation must be drowned out.”⁴⁹⁵

For Kierkegaard, the root of violence is spiritual evasion⁴⁹⁶ where individuals are most threatened by the psychological integration and wholeness of others. Holiness or goodness in others has to be repelled and resisted at all costs because they are a reminder of their own state of spiritual immaturity and inadequacy. This in itself can lead to a state of jealousy or rage which ends in violence or lashing out towards the other. What is being protected and fended off is the avoidance of inner growth and ultimately a relationship with God. What is being protected is the fear of change, fear of the future, fear of the unknown. To encounter the living God is not easy but risky for it is fundamentally a call to grow up which demands courage and cooperation with the grace or help of God freely offered. “To sum up: we have arrived at the insight that resistance to the possibility of spiritual growth gives rise to violence. It is not simply the case that individuals fail to become psychologically integrated: they are actively evading the possibility of becoming psychologically integrated. Sin is not a

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 54.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 9.

negation but a position. It is this active evasion, this willful sloth that is the most basic root of the impulse to attack another human being.”⁴⁹⁷

Another psychological thinker who has shed light on the darker and violent motivation of the human condition is Carl Jung,⁴⁹⁸ who observed the human tendency of self-deception, the ability of the self to lie, to cover up the flawed nature of the human condition by projecting it elsewhere. The Christian notion of original sin, which is essentially the acknowledgement of being shackled with a warped and wounded constitution, leads to the realization in all people of the profound inadequacy of human nature. In the words of Saint Paul: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want but I do the very thing I hate.”⁴⁹⁹ This self-loathing is a realization that buried deep within the human condition is the carnal presence of sin that is ceaseless and restless in its inventive propensity for evil. This shadow side of the self is so contradictory to the cultivation of a positive self-image that it is projected outward, discharged and dumped onto others. This mechanism can be interpreted as generative of scapegoats itself, but it most certainly tarnishes the other with an array of negative perceptions and personas, transferring the negative impulses onto the alien out-with. “Since the shadow is that part of the personality which contains repressed feelings of inferiority and guilt, the ego attempts to reinforce its positive self-image by projecting the shadow onto other human beings. Political entities express this by seeing evil in some other group which must be struggled against to the death. Human beings do not want to face honestly their own moral failings and inadequacies, so they see tyranny, oppression, treachery, and other

⁴⁹⁷ Bellinger, 55.

⁴⁹⁸ AD 1875-1961.

⁴⁹⁹ Romans 7:15.

negatives in the ‘enemy’.”⁵⁰⁰ The danger arises when a whole community suffers from this same psychological state, functioning in a way which is blighted by this spiritual sickness. “The society develops a need to identify and attack an enemy. The society selects scapegoats and sacrifices them as a way of reinforcing its impulse to ego-protection. *We hate most those who hold out to us a goal, an ideal.*”⁵⁰¹

Raymund Schwager, a Girardian scholar, concluded that a community’s great need to create scapegoats wasn’t simply a tributary or conduit to channel out negative energy building up within a community, like some social sewer. Rather the scapegoats, who were often selected in a random and arbitrary fashion, were also decoys, where God was intended as the real target; Scapegoating in fact reveals a deeper underlying hatred of God. The New Testament texts reveals that “rampant resentment against God is what ultimately lies behind the tendency towards violence, and the fact that through all random scapegoats God is aimed at as the supposedly guilty one shows a new connection between the mechanism of unanimous violence and the origin of sacred ideas. If at every ganging-up against a random victim, God is meant in a hidden and mysterious way as the ultimate scapegoat, then some dark notion of God must also be projected into each random victim.”⁵⁰² The witness of the Gospel is important because it unmasks the worldly power structures and stratifications of inequality in a society that feeds off rivalry, envy and competitive desire known as *mimesis*. The Word of God when it enters this situation, fraught with its natural undercurrent of violence, challenges it by its mere presence. Jesus, the word of God Incarnate articulates an absolute contradiction to the status quo of generating

⁵⁰⁰ Bellinger, 18.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 67.

⁵⁰² Schwager, Raymund, S.J. (1987), *Must there be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible*, Gracewing, New York, 199.

scapegoats. His presence represents such a clear and present danger to the stability of the accepted order that the apparatus of sacrifice is swiftly brought to bear to snuff out and extinguish his message. Paradoxically, it is his death that constitutes a great epiphany which casts a profound searchlight on the nuts and bolts of the prevailing system, revealing a radical critique of its existence; a mechanism which has lain hidden since the foundation of the world. “The revelation, the disclosure, the unmasking of the mimetic world occurs in his death on the Cross, the sign whose signification and significance is that the prevalence of mimetic desire and rivalry, which are actuated and controlled through social structures of substitution or sacrifice, cannot tolerate the presence of the one who does not distinguish people and values according to these structures that control and validate violence.”⁵⁰³

The Cross unmask the violent beating heart of human culture and the lie of sacred violence

The Cross of Christ thus stands as some vast theological Grand Canyon that exposes the structures that society uses to deflect turbulence and violence from within its own midst. The Cross unmask the violent heart of human culture. This can only be achieved by God entering into the whole framework and thereby showing that not only is he opposed to such violence, but is also the only one capable of freeing individuals and societies from such a self-perpetuating system. He is “the only agent who is capable of escaping from these structures and freeing us from their dominance.... a non-violent deity can only signal his existence to mankind by having himself driven out by violence - by demonstrating that he is not able to establish

⁵⁰³ Williams, James G. (1991), *The Bible, Violence and the Sacred. Liberation from the Myth of Sanctioned Violence*, HarperSanFrancisco, 214-215.

himself in the Kingdom of Violence.”⁵⁰⁴ This exposes the inherent lie of sacred violence, where religion and the technology of sacrificial rites captures the original violent act and seeks to discharge it for the good of the community, assuming all along that it is an a priori antidote designed by God. “It becomes increasingly clear that the actual initiative to kill does not originate in God after all, but in human beings. Sacred violence is not from God, but simply human beings attacking one another.”⁵⁰⁵ Furthermore, to interpret Christ’s death as a good old-fashioned sacrifice runs the danger of perpetuating the old mythic elements of sacrifice that are grounded in the ancient but primitive concept of placating an angry deity, whilst simultaneously shoring up the whole violent edifice. The Cross works by unravelling, deconstructing, revealing and demystifying such ancient mythic paraphernalia. “Jesus’ death helps us to see that Jesus did not die as such a sacrifice. Rather, Jesus’ death reveals God’s love as that which refuses to participate in the cycle of mimetic desire and vengeance. Jesus’ death is *not* an act of violence God needs.”⁵⁰⁶ However, René Girard was the first to analyse the biblical texts through the psychoanalytic and literary grid which gave rise to a hermeneutic which suggested that violence lies at the core of culture and the structural matrix of all religion.⁵⁰⁷ Girard’s atonement theology may indeed be built on an ontology of violence that can lead to a negative perception of culture itself,⁵⁰⁸ and even result in a Gnostic view of salvation as knowledge based.⁵⁰⁹ Consequently, we need to critically evaluate René Girard’s hypothesis and test its veracity close up.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 236.

⁵⁰⁵ Grimsrud, Ted, cited in: Swartley, Willard M. (2000), *Violence Renounced. René Girard, Biblical Studies and Peacemaking*, Pandora Press, Pennsylvania, 50.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 51.

⁵⁰⁷ Boersma, 178-179.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 150.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 142.

For Girard there is no ambiguity in identifying the fact that violence lurks behind every culture and is indeed the foundational principle and structure⁵¹⁰ that gives rise to all cultures. Human beings are violent animals, and unlike the animal kingdom which has inherent braking mechanisms in situations of rivalry or competition, human violence can spin out of control unchecked. Furthermore, human culture is chameleon-like in its predisposition and ability to permanently conceal from itself its own collective origins rooted in violence.⁵¹¹ “People do not wish to know that the whole of human culture is based on the mythic process of conjuring away man’s violence by endlessly projecting it upon new victims. All cultures and all religions are built on this foundation, which they then conceal, just as the tomb is built around the dead body that it conceals.”⁵¹² Society is built on various murders over which tombs hide the evidence, but more duplicitly, conceal the foundational murder from consciousness altogether. Although this is transparently a dark and pessimistic assessment of human culture, one only has to cast one’s eye on the news or the world of film and entertainment, to see that murder and killing are ubiquitous and indicative of humanity’s inherent blood lust, for which the young are initiated at an early age.⁵¹³ The biblical data with its aetiological pattern points to the first cities being built from the hand of Cain, a hand that was stained with the blood of his brother Abel, the first murder. Civilization, therefore, has its architectural foundations thrust firmly into the primordial murder.⁵¹⁴ With a further transcendental twist Girard blatantly attributes

⁵¹⁰ Girard, René (1986), *The Scapegoat*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 94.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁵¹² Girard, 2003, 163 & Girard, René (1978), *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 164.

⁵¹³ “No other religious system has ever rivalled the myth of redemptive violence in its ability to catechize its young so totally. From the earliest age children are awash in depictions of violence as the ultimate solution in human conflicts.” Wink, Walter (1992), *Engaging the Powers. Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 19, 23.

⁵¹⁴ “The lesson of the Bible is precisely that the culture born of violence must return to violence. In the initial stages, we observe a brilliant flowering of culture: techniques are invented; towns spring from

culture's violent beginnings to the manipulative presence of Satan who himself is responsible for triggering all murders.⁵¹⁵ "My thesis is really that the Gospels view Satan as the principal - if not the entire reality - of human culture since the foundation of the world."⁵¹⁶

Satan will be put on the theological rack later and although Girard doesn't have a dualist conception of creation it would be true to say that Satan casts a dark shadow over human culture, being the "prince of this world"⁵¹⁷ who figures largely, but albeit discretely, in human culture. It would be true to say that human interaction often ends in conflict and rivalry, where violence is almost a tangible force that permeates and pollutes everything it touches. "Violence has been transformed into a sort of seminal fluid that impregnates objects on contact and whose diffusion, like electricity or Balzacian magnetism, is determined by physical laws."⁵¹⁸ Violence itself begets violence which can start a chain reaction where vengeance becomes the driving factor to redress both real and perceived incidents of conflict and injustice. Vengeance in more primitive societies was a vicious circle that easily spun out of control, but in more advanced societies the judicial system as a social institution operates by suspending escalations of violence; deflecting vengeance by effectively having the monopoly of vengeance at its disposal but in a more controlled manner.⁵¹⁹ Violence then is something eminently communicable and like a beast from its lair once stirred up will hurl itself indiscriminately on any surrogate victim if deprived of its original

the desert. But very soon, the violence that has been inadequately contained by the founding murder and the legal barriers deriving from it, starts to escape and propagate." Girard, 1978, 148.

⁵¹⁵ "Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the Devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies." John 8, 43-44.

⁵¹⁶ Girard, 2003, 203.

⁵¹⁷ John: 12:31, 14:30, 16:11.

⁵¹⁸ Girard, René (1995), *Violence and the Sacred*, The Athlone Press, London, 28.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 15.

object on which to vent its fury. Violence within a human grouping can only be contained for so long without it bursting its banks and people being caught up in a flood tide of violence.⁵²⁰ The manifestation of violent outbursts, are usually linked with the presence of spilt blood as the vital life force that is profligately shed, which demands not only retribution but also contaminates that which it touches. “When men are enjoying peace and security, blood is a rare sight. When violence is unloosed, however, blood appears everywhere - on the ground, underfoot, forming great pools. Its very fluidity gives form to the contagious nature of violence. Its presence proclaims murder and announces new upheavals to come. Blood stains everything it touches the colour of violence and death. Its very appearance seems, as the saying goes, to cry out for vengeance.”⁵²¹ Religion, according Girard in all cultural manifestations has the supreme function of capping and containing this violence so as to redirect and discharge it safely out with the bounds of the community, yet ambiguously and paradoxically using sacrificial violence to affect this.⁵²²

Ritual and sacrifice regulate violence, which is mistakenly seen as the sacred

“Religion, then, is far from *useless*. It humanizes violence; it protects man from his own violence by taking it out of his hands, transforming it into a transcendent and ever-present danger to be kept in check by the appropriate rites appropriately observed.”⁵²³ The function of ritual is two-fold; to purify violence and trick it into

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 30.

⁵²¹ Ibid., 34.

⁵²² “In my opinion, mimetic violence is at the heart of the system. We need to see what results can be obtained if we suppose that such violence is in effect the motor of the religious system.” Girard, 1978,13.

⁵²³ Girard, 1995,134.

emptying itself onto a victim whose death will create no further reprisals.⁵²⁴ Once sacrificial rites have been seen to be effective, a community will seek to regulate the violence which manifests itself from within by using sacrifice as a safety valve which protects the community from its own violence. The victim virtually becomes a substitute for the entire community, drawing to itself all the scattered elements of dissension and angst within the community and neutralizing them.⁵²⁵ The awesome machinery of ritual demonstrates that violence and the sacred are inseparable,⁵²⁶ being more or less synonymous, although it is only *good* when it is outside the boundaries of the community itself,⁵²⁷ where it can be worshipped at a safe distance as a sort of divinity because of the peace it brings in its wake. The sacred is thus perceived as a force transcendent and external to the community which may exert its presence in an incomprehensible way, beyond language, but one which is rather beneficent rather than malevolent.⁵²⁸ Religion has the supreme function of harnessing and communicating with the divine for the good of the community. “Religion is nothing other than this immense effort to keep the peace. *The sacred is violence*, but if religious man worships violence it is only insofar as the worship of violence is supposed to bring peace; religion is entirely concerned with peace, but the means it has of bringing it about are never free of sacrificial violence.”⁵²⁹

Violence or rivalry within human communities is linked to the process of imitation or “mimesis”,⁵³⁰ a theory which both political and the natural sciences have overlooked

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 36.

⁵²⁵ Girard, 2003, 77 & Girard, 1995, 8.

⁵²⁶ Girard, 1995, 19.

⁵²⁷ Ibid., 254.

⁵²⁸ Girard, 1978, 42-43.

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 32.

⁵³⁰ “Rather than the exhausted word *imitation*, then, I chose to employ the Greek word *mimesis*, without, however, adopting a Platonic theory of mimetic rivalry, which does not exist in any case. The

or been unable to penetrate.⁵³¹ The imitation of desires can become rivalistic where we desire what the other desires in the game of one-upmanship, where the other can become a model that blocks the originally desired object. Another's desire itself may even intensify the initial attractiveness of the object resulting in a triangularity of desire. It can be observed that quite often children do not know what to desire and have to be inducted or taught. Indeed, the whole of western society is built on a huge orgy of consumerism where advertising whips people up into a mimetic frenzy of avarice and superfluous desire. It is no coincidence that the last prohibition in the Decalogue sums up the preceding four by highlighting the danger of "coveting" or desiring one's neighbour's goods. Mimetic desire does not always result in conflict, but it frequently does as the tenth commandment suggests.⁵³² It is, therefore, listed because it is a serious attempt to root out the number one problem in every human community - and that is violence. "The principal source of violence between human beings is mimetic rivalry, the rivalry resulting from imitation of a model who becomes a rival or of a rival who becomes a model."⁵³³

Yet without mimesis there would be no human language, culture, learning or intelligence or even freedom. It is both a force of cultural cohesion and integration but potentially one of discord and dissolution. In fact mimesis separates human beings from the animals in their capacity for imitation.⁵³⁴ Mimetic desire may be the force of attraction and desire that leads to conflict but it is not bad in itself, indeed it is even intrinsically good for without it we could not be open to what is either human or

only advantage of the Greek word is that it makes the conflictual aspect of mimesis conceivable, even if it reveals its cause." Girard, 1978, 18.

⁵³¹ Girard, 1986, 115.

⁵³² Exodus 20:17.

⁵³³ Girard, René (2001), *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, GraceWing, Herefordshire, England, 11.

⁵³⁴ Aristotle, Poetics 4.

divine. “Mimetic desire enables us to escape from the animal realm. It is responsible for the best and the worst in us, for what lowers us below the animal level as well as what elevates us above it.”⁵³⁵ Mimetic desire, therefore, does not need to be renounced but needs to be redirected and focused on that which essentially has its terminus in non-rivalry, non-competitive and non-egotistical grasping behaviour that seeks only status and prestige. This isn’t necessarily the monastic and ascetic *Imitation of Christ* as found in Thomas à Kempis’s spiritual classic, but rather the desire of Jesus himself to resemble the Father as much as possible, and so to reflect perfectly the image of God.⁵³⁶ That way we are liberated from the scrum of competitive and vicious rivalistic desires that lead to violence rather than to true transcendence. “What Jesus advocates is mimetic desire. Imitate me, and imitate the Father through me, he says, so it’s twice mimetic. Jesus seems to say that the only way to avoid violence is to imitate me, and imitate the Father.”⁵³⁷ Since Jesus recommends imitation, it is a fundamental good, being the only true highway back to God, but like human freedom it can also be a sure route to Satan. The difference lies in the way of imitation. Jesus imitates God in a spirit of childlike innocence and obedience, where Satan imitates God in a spirit of acquisitive desire and rivalry.⁵³⁸

A mimetic crisis within a community generates the need for a surrogate victim

Human communities then can be a seething mass of competing and conflictual desires which can all too easily lead to a breakdown and collapse in distinctions, difference and identity within a community triggering a “mimetic crisis”. With the crumbling of

⁵³⁵ Girard, 2001, 16.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁵³⁷ Girard, 2003, 63.

⁵³⁸ Ibid., 197-198.

order, suppressed rivalries begin to surface and spread like a plague.⁵³⁹ This erosion, often held in check by prohibitions and ritualistic taboos, heralds the surging of reciprocal violence that spreads through the community like wild-fire bringing great contamination, threatening the very fabric, stability and survival of the cultural order.⁵⁴⁰ A common enemy is required that will prevent open internecine warfare or anarchy, by projecting the collective negative load onto a victim who can be accused of some perceived guilt. “The slightest hint, the most groundless accusation, can circulate with vertiginous speed and is transformed into irrefutable proof. The corporate sense of conviction snowballs, each member taking confidence from his neighbour by a rapid process of mimesis. The firm conviction of the group is based on no other evidence than the unshakeable unanimity of its own illogic.”⁵⁴¹ This melt-down in difference results in the critical need to seek out a surrogate victim so that the scattered hatred of the many can be unified in the principle of “all against one”. The mechanism of the scapegoat emerges and is thus born.⁵⁴² This mimetic agitation or crisis is so contagious that it is virtually unstoppable, until all disparate hatreds converge and are effectively transferred onto an innocent victim, who is then expelled from the community taking the accumulative angst and repressed hostility of the group with them. “Once the contagion of mimetic violence is reintroduced into the community, it cannot be contained. The community, then, changes its tactic entirely.

⁵³⁹ Schwager, 1987, 15.

⁵⁴⁰ Girard, 1995, 49.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 79.

⁵⁴² “In the case of the scapegoat the process of substitution is so transparent that we understand it at first glance. It is this comprehension that the modern usage of ‘scapegoat’ expresses; in other words, it is a spontaneous interpretation of the relationship between the ancient Jewish ritual and transferences of hostility in our world today.” Girard, 2001, 155. In the ritual of the Scapegoat as practised in Leviticus 16:21, which comprised part of the ceremony associated with the *Day of the Atonement*, the high priest placed his hands on the head of the goat thereby transferring all the sins and poisonous relations within the community. The goat was then driven into the wilderness the haunt of the goat demon Azrael, or even forced over a cliff. Legend has it that a scarlet thread was tied to it that when unravelled sufficiently became white to symbolise an effective deliverance of sin out from the community, thus their sins are cleansed and they became as “white as snow”. Psalm 50 v 9.

Instead of trying to roll back mimetic violence it tries to get rid of it by encouraging it and by bringing it to a climax that triggers the happy solution of ritual sacrifice with the help of a substitute victim.”⁵⁴³

The scapegoat fulfils the extraordinary position of being at once feared and held responsible for all the ills of the group, yet simultaneously having the power to affect a resolution and cure. This dual function is curious until it is realized that the animosity and polarization that configures the scapegoat, is linked to their ability to soak up the animosity of the group and then deal with it by discharging it through their own exile.⁵⁴⁴ They are thus feared and then revered; they are both the poison and the antidote. “If the scapegoats were not unanimously feared and hated to start with, they could not sponge off the cesspool of scandals inside the community; they could not restore the peace. As a result of this process, these same scapegoats may arouse such gratitude and reverence that they are ultimately made divine. But their peace-making power is always dependent on a previous belief in their power as troublemakers.”⁵⁴⁵ The mimetic crisis has the power to decompose communities and then recompose them again through the mimetic violence which triggers the scapegoat mechanism. This process brings intense relief and a sense of liberation where the victim is perceived to be initially some monster but now hailed as a divine saviour. Girard refers to this as the surrogate victim becoming a “monstrous double”⁵⁴⁶ who partakes in all possible differences within the community. There is

⁵⁴³ Girard, 2003, 13.

⁵⁴⁴ “The Greek *pharmakoi*, singular *pharmakos*, refers to victims who were ritually beaten, driven out of cities, and killed, for example, by being forced over the edge of a precipice. The word *pharmakos*, designating a person who is selected as a ritual victim, is related to *pharmakon*, which means both ‘remedy’ and ‘poison’, depending on the context.” Girard, 2001, 51.

⁵⁴⁵ Girard, 2003, 218-219.

⁵⁴⁶ Girard, 1995, 271.

effectively a “double transference”⁵⁴⁷ firstly of aggression followed then by reconciliation, which appears transcendental and sacred in its origin. “Like a bolt of lightning, the scapegoat mechanism suddenly frees all men without being answerable to anyone except perhaps to the victim himself, who is likely to become an idol after his disappearance. No one can control or manipulate the mechanism. It bears all the marks of a supernatural intervention. Everything about it suggests a power that transcends wretched humanity. It is the prototype of every sacred epiphany.”⁵⁴⁸

The dark trinity of desire, violence and the scapegoat which brings peace

The community afflicted undergoes a profound purging or catharsis through its own blood letting. The process of hunting out a surrogate victim, the selection of a target who becomes a common adversary can be arbitrary, yet it is effective in eliminating everyone’s antagonism.⁵⁴⁹ The community polarized against their innocent victim, are oblivious to the mechanism itself, only being satisfied in an unshakeable conviction that they have found the one and only cause of its troubles.⁵⁵⁰ Everyone within the community is aware of the potentially explosive build up of smouldering violence. It is as if everyone moves with extreme caution, “It is as if the community had suddenly become an arsenal piled high with gunpowder.”⁵⁵¹ It becomes, therefore, not only expedient but convenient to blame an individual, despite their innocence, for they become, to all intents and purposes, the dangerous person within their midst. “Its members instinctively seek an immediate and violent cure for the onslaught of unbearable violence, and strive desperately to convince themselves that all their ills

⁵⁴⁷ Girard, 1978, 37.

⁵⁴⁸ Girard, René (1987), *Job the Victim of His People*, Stanford University Press, California, 75.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁵⁰ Girard, 1978, 27.

⁵⁵¹ Girard, 1995, 122.

are the fault of a lone individual who can be easily disposed of.”⁵⁵² Yet because the violence that is directed on the victim is intended to restore the equilibrium and tranquility of the group, it is logical to suppose that it is the victim themselves that brings this about. Order and difference that was dissolved in the mimetic crisis is reconfigured and the old boundaries of cultural distinction magically reappear. “Once the victim is killed the crisis is over, peace is regained, the plague is healed, all the elements become calm again, chaos withdraws, what is blocked or locked or paralysed is opened, the incomplete is completed, gaps are filled, and the confusion of differences is restored to proper differentiation.”⁵⁵³ The origins of the violent sacred is, therefore, the mimetic disturbance generated from within the group. This itself is only diminished by the scapegoat mechanism that halts the vicious circle of violence, albeit by using the more surgical violence of expulsion or even murder. The victim becomes the focal point around which a malevolent quasi-substance, the sacred, appears to accumulate.⁵⁵⁴ This polarization continues until it flips over to a beneficent force being transformed by the expulsion or sacrifice of the victim. This process is interpreted as a sacred intervention because it appears to arise outside the demarcation lines of the community. There is a clear perception of boundaries, the interior and exterior, where the inner profane space is inhabited by ordinary people and the outer realm inhabited by the powers or divinity responsible for the scapegoat mechanism.⁵⁵⁵ The surrogate victim moves freely between the two, becoming a barrier and link between the sacred and the community,⁵⁵⁶ where ultimately they are seen in the new superhuman light as saviour, the restorer of peace.

⁵⁵² Ibid., 79-80.

⁵⁵³ Girard, 2001, 65.

⁵⁵⁴ Girard, 1978, 48.

⁵⁵⁵ Schwager, 1987, 23.

⁵⁵⁶ Girard, 1995, 271.

Girard postulates that religion has played an invaluable and strategic role in culture by operating as a safety valve that ensures that violence embedded within communities, is systematically channelled outward by the viaducts of the cult. “Religion invariably strives to subdue violence, to keep it from running wild. Paradoxically, the religious and moral authorities in a community attempts to instill nonviolence, as an active force into daily life and as a mediating force into ritual life, through the application of violence.”⁵⁵⁷ The anthropological significance of sacrifice is that all religious cultures have practised sacrifice in the widespread belief that their internal violence can be purged by the immolation of a victim. Sacrificial immolation is a vehicle which suggests that behind the rite lies a real blood sacrifice that serves as a model for religious ritual. “The religious communities try to remember that event in their mythologies, and they try to reproduce it in their sacrifices.”⁵⁵⁸ Human sacrifices are often later replaced by animal substitutes but there always lurks the original foundational murder behind a sacrificial rite. The genus of whom can function as a surrogate victim in communities are in fact numerous and heterogeneous. They encompass a wide spectrum of human candidates as potential victims, which may include the weak and infirm, children, prisoners of war, slaves, the handicapped, the ethnically different, to anyone who represents a threat to a community because of their perceived difference. It will include the dregs of society right up to Royalty who are often at the eye of a storm when there is social upheaval and revolution.⁵⁵⁹ Victims are isolated and blamed for all sorts of heinous crimes for the greater good and survival of the community.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁵⁸ Girard, 2003, 11.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 81.

A possible target need only be slightly more attractive⁵⁶⁰ or more intelligent than others in the group, but as long as the whole group can come together in agreement that the individual is *guilty* and responsible for all their ills then they will fit the criteria. The victim who is often a marginal figure, politically weak or isolated, is selected almost randomly, yet must function as a mediator between the profane and the sacred. For this reason they must simultaneously differ from members of the community but also resemble them, otherwise there will not be an effective polarization of the malevolent aspects of the community around them.⁵⁶¹ The victim is both a foreigner and also a native, as they move from the inside to the outside in order to successfully accomplish their role as saviour and refounder of the community.⁵⁶² What is critical is that the gap between the community and the individual must not grow too wide otherwise they will cease to function as a true representative and surrogate. To be a successful victim, or a good conductor of the violent impulses of the group, they have to be of them but not one of them, otherwise violence will spill over and impure violence will mingle with sacred violence,⁵⁶³ and reprisals will be sought.⁵⁶⁴ What is clear is that members of the group are oblivious to the workings of the scapegoat mechanism, it has a certain aura of invisibility about it; for if it dawned on them what they were subconsciously doing the process would short circuit and grind to a halt, for this reason most communities are unable to identify their own scapegoats. "Human beings do not understand the mechanism responsible for their

⁵⁶⁰ Girard, 1986, 86.

⁵⁶¹ Girard, 1978, 69.

⁵⁶² Ibid., 111.

⁵⁶³ Girard, 1995, 39.

⁵⁶⁴ "In societies where human sacrifice is practiced, orphans are the chosen victims. The sacrifice of a child whose parents are living runs the risk of making enemies of them....The temptation for the community to become the victim's champions is reduced to the minimum by sacrificing an orphan, with the result that there is very little risk of adding oil to the flames of violence. The chances of the sacrifice being effective are maximized." Girard, 1987, 78.

reconciliation; the secret of its effectiveness eludes them, which is why they attempt to reproduce the entire event as exactly as possible.”⁵⁶⁵

Sacrifice and ritual are organically connected. Sacrifice expressly has the function of quelling and subduing violence that arises naturally within human communities, seeking to prevent further conflicts from erupting.⁵⁶⁶ “The function of ritual is to purify violence; that is to *trick* violence into spending itself on victims whose death will provoke no reprisals.”⁵⁶⁷ Ritual sacrifice is an atrophied version of the original collective murder which leaves its distinctive trace⁵⁶⁸ or echo. The orientation of a rite however is designed to mitigate violence and banish it to the outside, by revisiting and repeating as faithfully as possible the collective violence of their predecessors,⁵⁶⁹ yet this time safely enveloped in the cult. Ritual sacrifice is, therefore, founded on a double substitution. The first is the selection of the substitute victim that represents the entire community, which goes relatively unnoticed. The second is the ritualistic substitution which is merged and superimposed onto the first that seeks to reproduce the original violent act or murder.⁵⁷⁰ The rite is distinctive in its attempt to recapture the freshness of the original experience in the language of the sacred, safely mirroring the original mimetic crisis.⁵⁷¹ It can even be said that the mystery of the former is sacramentally petrified in the latter. Ritual initiates a new constructive cycle that brings alive, through a process of anamnesis, the original violence now focused on the

⁵⁶⁵ Girard, 1978, 28.

⁵⁶⁶ Girard, 1995, 14.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., 103.

⁵⁶⁹ Girard, 1986, 56.

⁵⁷⁰ Girard, 1995, 102.

⁵⁷¹ “Rite is the reenactment of mimetic crises in a spirit of voluntary religious and social collaboration, a reenactment in order to reactivate the scapegoat mechanism for the benefit of society rather than for the detriment of the victim who is perpetually sacrificed. For this reason, in the diachronic evolution of rites the disorders that precede and necessitate the sacrifice are invariably attenuated, whereas the festive and convivial aspects increase in importance.” Girard, 1986, 140.

surrogate victim which protects the community allowing culture and community to flourish.⁵⁷² The mechanism which achieves this always remains elusive and slightly out of view, yet it brings peace and a sense of well-being. “Ritual imitation differentiates, distinguishes, simplifies, organizes and classifies data in such a way as always to mutilate, destroy and hide mimetic mechanisms, especially that of the scapegoat, whose differentiating and mystifying effects it endlessly prolongs. Ritual thought can never fully grasp its own origin, which is perpetuated in philosophical thought and, today, in the social sciences that have inherited the powers of rite as well as its basic impotence.”⁵⁷³

The Crowd

In a sense, the impotence of a rite is a reality for it has to be endlessly repeated, because communities are endlessly generating new and innovative forms of violence. The principal agency for the ejection of the scapegoat is the phenomenon of the crowd. All individuality degenerates in the heightened state of mimetic excitement and contagion forcing a group dynamic like that of a pack animal, a lynch mob that seeks a war of all against one. The crowd subsumes all individuality and demands uniformity. “We find an acute sensitivity to the psychology of the lynch mob; the crowd has a need to kill its victim - a need that has arisen out of its own dynamics, without any reference to the actual guilt or innocence of the one being killed. The crowd demands unanimity and will turn on anyone who does not support that goal into another victim.”⁵⁷⁴ In the crowd there can be a vortex of mimesis where each member reaffirms the blood lust of the other, inciting the other to more extreme acts

⁵⁷² Girard, 1995, 93.

⁵⁷³ Girard, 1987, 97.

⁵⁷⁴ Bellinger, 63.

of false accusation or savagery against the victim. The crowd is a place for the coward, a place to hide in order to evade the truth, to regress safe in the knowledge that whilst being a member of the baying mob, one is at least not its victim. The community deeply disturbed by simmering and underground resentments seeks to purge itself of those elements of discord, and hunts out the alleged corruptor and traitor in its midst. “The crowd by definition seeks action but cannot affect natural causes. It therefore looks for an accessible cause that will appease its appetite for violence. Those who make up the crowd are always potential persecutors, for they dream of purging the community of the impure elements that corrupt it, the traitors who undermine it.”⁵⁷⁵ The crowd gravitates to an epistemological opinion that embraces the convenience of untruth, selecting an innocent victim and blacking them so that the community can appear white.⁵⁷⁶ “For Girard, the untruth of the crowd consists in the way it seizes upon a victim and kills him to meet its own psychological needs. The crowd prevents itself from descending into a chaos of self-destruction by choosing a scapegoat whose death will create a new sense of social unanimity and cohesion.”⁵⁷⁷ The mechanism of generating scapegoats, should then, alert us to a hermeneutic of suspicion where there appears a fundamental flaw in the self-generating machinery of sacrifice itself, where on closer inspection it is not the fingerprints of the sacred that are pulling the levers that cast out violence, but rather the demonic that luxuriates in mimetic contagion, conflict and rivalry.

⁵⁷⁵ Girard, 1986, 16 & Girard, 2003, 111.

⁵⁷⁶ Kierkegaard’s phrase “the crowd is untruth” perfectly summarizes Girard’s social theory.

⁵⁷⁷ Bellinger, 79.

Satan is the engine of mimetic desire

Girard's insight into the dynamics of human communities and the anthropological reality of mimesis and the violent contagion that it can trigger, fomenting a furnace of scandals leads him to postulate that the entire process is driven by the demonic. Satan is the engine of mimetic desire running wild and loose in any community. This fundamentally is indicated by the violence and false accusation that is mounted and hurled onto an innocent victim. The nomenclature of the Devil has always traditionally been understood as being that of a liar, a murderer⁵⁷⁸ and false accuser⁵⁷⁹ from the beginning. "In transforming a community of people with distinct identities and roles into a hysterical mass, Satan produces myths and is the principle of systematic accusation that bursts forth from the contagious imitation provoked by scandals. Once the unfortunate victim is completely isolated, deprived of defenders, nothing can protect her or him from the aroused crowd."⁵⁸⁰ Satan is the motor or driving force of mimetic scandals⁵⁸¹ that blocks other people's pathway to fulfilment, but succeeds at the same time attributing the blame onto others within a community. Satan sows the scandals and reaps the mimetic whirlwind.⁵⁸² Individual scandals start small but all eventually converge and meet in a highway which sweeps everyone along. "The road on which Satan starts us on is broad and easy; it is the superhighway of mimetic

⁵⁷⁸ "You are of your father the Devil and it is the desires of your father that you wish to do. From the beginning he was a murderer and had nothing to do with the truth because the truth is not in him. When he speaks lies, he draws them from his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies." John 8:42-44.

⁵⁷⁹ Revelation 12:10.

⁵⁸⁰ Girard, 2001, 35.

⁵⁸¹ The gospels use a word that is almost synonymous with Satan: "Skandalon" which refers to an obstacle against which, one cannot help stumbling. This stumbling block induces a limp which impairing one's mobility and facility to walk away from the cause of mimetic rivalry itself. This in itself induces addictive behaviour that is self-destructive, it attracts us but at the same time also irritates us. The skandalon is all kinds of destructive addiction, drugs, sex, power, and above all morbid competitiveness, professional, sexual, political, intellectual, and spiritual, especially spiritual. See: Girard, 2003, 198.

⁵⁸² Girard, 2001, 33.

crisis. But then suddenly there appears an unexpected obstacle between us and the object of our desire, and to our consternation, just when we thought we had left Satan far behind us, it is he, or one of his surrogates, who shows up to block the route. This is the first of many transformations of Satan: the *seducer* of the beginnings is transformed quickly into a forbidding *adversary*, an opponent more serious than all the prohibitions not yet transgressed.”⁵⁸³

Satan casts out Satan, thereby making himself indispensable to community living

Satan, therefore, is linked to the circular mechanism of violence, he is the name given to the mimetic process as a whole which creates conflict and rivalry. He both stirs up the mimetic snowballing and then the violence that quenches it which brings peace. He is the self-organizing system that paradoxically creates disorder and then order within a community; the division and then the mysterious bond that unites. “The demonic allows, on the one hand, for every tendency toward conflict in human relations and for the centrifugal force at the heart of the community, and, on the other hand, for the centripetal force that brings men together, the mysterious glue of that same community.”⁵⁸⁴ This analysis of human culture may be profoundly pessimistic but it does supply an explanation that the sciences of sociology, anthropology and psychoanalysis have failed to give an alternative unifying theory or meta-narrative. Satan is, therefore, indispensable in human communities because Satan casts out Satan using the violence of the scapegoat mechanism, thereby giving the illusion of the permanent restoration of peace and tranquility. The kingdom of Satan is nothing other than the violence that casts itself out, he is the exorcist and the exorcism. “If he

⁵⁸³ Ibid., P33.

⁵⁸⁴ Girard, 1986, 196.

were purely a destroyer, Satan would have lost his domain long ago. To understand why he is the master of all the kingdoms of this world, we must take Jesus at his word: disorder expels disorder, or in other words Satan really expels Satan. By executing this extraordinary feat, he has been able to make himself indispensable, and so his power remains great.”⁵⁸⁵ Essentially God has nothing to do with the process for the force of expulsion always originates in Satan himself.⁵⁸⁶

Satan then is not necessarily an ontological being in his own right but is in fact parasitic on the whole process of human interaction that goes bad. He represents false transcendence that is achieved through the accusing and lynching of an innocent victim. The false accusations and lies that spin out of control until they all alight on one victim. Satan is no being other than the flimsy costume of falsehood and mendacity. “The devil’s ‘quintessential being’, the source from which he draws his lies, is the violent contagion that has no substance to it. The devil does not have a stable foundation; he has no being at all. To clothe himself in the semblance of being, he must act as a parasite on God’s creatures. He is totally mimetic, which amounts to saying nonexistent as an individual self.”⁵⁸⁷ Indeed, he is incapable of existing apart from the state of quasi-possession, where he increases in strength and influence only when resistance to mimetic urges weaken.⁵⁸⁸ With this understanding Satan doesn’t have a personality or being as such, which can be interpreted as an alternative centre of power in the universe. There is no dualistic principle working itself out here, Satan is not another rival to God but a parasite on what God creates by imitating God in a

⁵⁸⁵ Girard, 2001, 35.

⁵⁸⁶ Girard, 1986, 189.

⁵⁸⁷ Girard, 2001, 42.

⁵⁸⁸ Girard, 1986, 196.

perverse and grotesque way. He is the monkey or ape of God.⁵⁸⁹ “To affirm that Satan has no actual being, as Christian theology has done, means that Christianity does not oblige us to see him as someone who really exists. The interpretation that assimilates Satan to realistic contagion and its consequences enables us, for the first time, to acknowledge the importance of the prince of this world without also endowing him with personal *being*. Traditional theology has rightly refused to do the latter.”⁵⁹⁰ Yet Satan is always someone, as he has the face both of an accuser in the process of violent expulsion of the surrogate victim, and for a time the face of the scapegoat himself as the satanic power attaches itself to the victim.⁵⁹¹ The end result is always the murder or expulsion of an innocent victim because the process is rooted in the ancient trail that leads back to the foundational murder of all communities. Girard darkly speculates that human culture is built over the tombs of deceit because human beings owe their origin to a self-perpetuating system that conceals its true nature, the lie about collective murder and its continuing usefulness in society. “That is the reason why he was a homicide from the beginning; Satan’s order had no origin other than murder and this murder is a lie. Human beings are sons of Satan because they are sons of this murder.”⁵⁹² For the sign of Cain is the sign of civilization. It is the sign of a murderer protected by God.⁵⁹³

The Gospels reveal what have been hidden since the foundation of the world

In the Gospels the great metaphor of the tomb is embedded within the text which cryptically suggests the conspiracy and concealment that is foundational to all human

⁵⁸⁹ Girard, 2001, 44 & Girard, 1986, 195.

⁵⁹⁰ Girard, 2001, 45.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., xii & 51.

⁵⁹² Girard, 2003, 161.

⁵⁹³ Williams, 185.

cultures.⁵⁹⁴ It betrays the need to conceal the reality of the corpse, to hide death, and particularly the death of innocent victims that always remain just out of view. It indicates that people lie and kill in order to conceal the original lie about violence and murder. This pattern is repeated in an endless cycle of violence embraced in the scapegoat mechanism. “Deep within the individual, as within the religious and cultural systems that fashion the individual, something is hidden, and this is not merely the individual *sin* of modern religiosity or the *complexes* of psychoanalysis. It is invariably a corpse that as it rots spreads its *uncleanness* everywhere.”⁵⁹⁵ Luke compares the Pharisees not just to beautiful white-washed tombs that conceal dead men’s bones,⁵⁹⁶ but more significantly to underground tombs that conceal not only death but their own existence. They remain hidden and invisible under a process of double concealment. “Woe unto you! for you are like graves which are not seen, and men walk over them without knowing it.”⁵⁹⁷ And for this reason the Gospels reveal what has been hidden since the foundation of the world⁵⁹⁸ in the history of all culture and at all times. Humanity has an insatiable appetite and need for ritualistic and sacred violence, which has no basis in God, but rather points to humanity’s own violent origins and constitution. Indeed, God has no need for sacrifice and it becomes apparent that He has, and always will be, on the side of victims *because* they are innocent. There is no irony or coincidence in the fragment of text that reveals that when Jesus dies on the Cross the heart of the sanctuary, and locus of cultic sacrificial activity, is exposed by the rending of the Temple curtain; the structure is now

⁵⁹⁴ “Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. So you are witnesses and consent to the deeds of your fathers; for they killed them, and you build their tombs.” Luke 11:47-48.

⁵⁹⁵ Girard, 1978, 165.

⁵⁹⁶ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you are like white-washed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.” Matthew 23:27.

⁵⁹⁷ Luke 11:44.

⁵⁹⁸ “I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.” Matthew 13:34.

redundant and superfluous. This message is underscored by the dead rising from their tombs and walking into the city. The sacrificial victims who have lain anonymously buried in unmarked graves walk and now talk.⁵⁹⁹ Their silence is effectively broken and their guilt vindicated. This is the power of the Gospels, they explosively reveal a non-sacrificial understanding of redemption.

God is on the side of victims

The Gospels themselves are the summit of a textual structure that has been quite literally soaked in revelation. The process itself started in the Old Testament and reaches its climax in the Passion. The Gospels are fundamentally dissimilar from conventional mythic systems for they do not operate on the same footing. They neither demonize nor divinize the scapegoat in the shifting sands of mimetic contagion. To all intents and purposes the Gospels are a road map that enables us to circumnavigate more archaic religions without losing the way.⁶⁰⁰ Their impact is such that mythic formulations and renditions of culture crumble when they encounter the Gospels, and in particular the Passion, such is their revelatory pedigree. “For centuries, now, the Passion has turned itself about as a triumph at the level of cultural understanding. It provides the interpretative grid by means of which we prevent texts of persecution from crystallizing into sacrificial mythology. In our own time all modernist culture, that bastion of anti-Christianity, begins to disintegrate on contact with the Gospel text. We owe all the real progress we have made in interpreting cultural phenomenon to that one revelation whose effect continues to deepen among

⁵⁹⁹ “And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.” Matthew 27:51-53.

⁶⁰⁰ Girard, 2001, 183.

us.”⁶⁰¹ This process of revelation is steeped within the biblical corpus which gradually emerges from the Hebrew scriptures that exposes the scapegoat mechanism, revealing a God that is fundamentally on the side of victims.

The Gospels fully unmask a truth already partially disclosed in the pages of the Old Testament. Indeed according to Raymund Schwager violence is the most central theme of the Old Testament,⁶⁰² where there are over six hundred passages linked directly to its reality with no other human activity mentioned as often.⁶⁰³ On closer scrutiny, however, divine violence is always an immediate consequence of corrupt and evil human actions,⁶⁰⁴ where human beings are the causal link in any chain of divine anger; for whenever sacred violence is mentioned it is always evidently human beings that are attacking one another.⁶⁰⁵ God himself never becomes violent, and violence doesn't originate from him, he only drives the guilty away from his presence leaving them to their own devices. Admittedly, this may include wicked men administering divine retribution or more fundamentally evil deeds simply being allowed to recoil on the perpetrators. Girard can easily be criticized as having a neo-Marcionite perception of the Judeo-Christian scriptures, for undoubtedly the Old Testament portray an ambiguous and arduous exodus away from the world of violence and sacred projection, which only reaches its fullest clarity in the pages of the Gospels. The process of demystification may start in the Old Testament but it only reaches its zenith in the Passion which “reveals the scapegoat mechanism, i.e. that which should remain invisible if these forces are to maintain themselves. By revealing

⁶⁰¹ Girard, 1987, 165.

⁶⁰² Schwager, 1987, 66. The decisive statement is: “Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence” (Genesis 6:11). It is sin characterised as one word: *Violence* (hamas).

⁶⁰³ Schwager, 1987, 47.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., 57.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., 67.

that mechanism and the surrounding mimeticism, the Gospels set in motion the only textual mechanism that can put an end to humanity's imprisonment in the system of mythological representation, based on the false transcendence of a victim who is made sacred because of the unanimous verdict of guilt."⁶⁰⁶ The Gospels alone then encapsulate the fullest knowledge and code-breaking capacity to reveal the ontological situation of humanity.

The Gospels expose the scapegoat mechanism and the innocence of the victim

The Gospels transparently unmask violence as the work of human projections which calls into question the authority and legitimacy of all sacrificial institutions. Myths operate by condemning the victims who are always isolated and overwhelmed by an agitated crowd. The Bible categorically refuses to tread the ancient trail of attributing guilt to the innocent and accuse them of any stereotypical crimes, for there is a sharp and clear reversal in understanding of where the guilt lies. The Bible refuses to allow the scapegoat mechanism to work out its own logic unobserved and without criticism. From the pages of the Psalms, from Job, the suffering servant of Isaiah right up to the Gospels, the Bible exposes the standard and well-worn practice utilized by all persecutors, but this time the victims are never silent, *because* they are never guilty. "The Gospels are not gentle with persecutors, who are ashamed like us. It unearths even in our most ordinary behaviour today, around the fire, the ancient gesture of the Aztec sacrifices and witch-hunters as they forced their victims into the flames."⁶⁰⁷ The Passion narratives tell the old story of redemptive violence but this time from the point of view of the victim sacrificed. Moreover, they reveal it by dramatically telling

⁶⁰⁶ Girard, 1986, 166.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., 156.

it as it is without wrapping it up in the illusion of myth, where redemptive violence is often crudely used by sinful human beings as a construct invented for peacemaking, but which has no divine legitimacy or sanction. Indeed the Bible teaches that the true God is not only *not* dependent on the scapegoat mechanism, in fact he dislikes it so much that he consistently takes the side of the victim *against* their persecutors.⁶⁰⁸ Humanity alone is the architect of the institution, inspired in part by the satanic genesis of myth making.⁶⁰⁹ With a whiff of Gnosticism, Girard indicates that the Gospel revelation functions as a liberating text because it is grounded in this knowledge that emancipates. “Men will finally be liberated by means of this knowledge, which will help them first to demystify the quasi-mythologies of our own history and then, before long, to demolish all the myths of our universe whose falsehoods we defend, not because we believe in them but because they protect us from the biblical revelation that will spring from the ashes of mythology and with which it has long been confused.”⁶¹⁰

From a purely anthropological view the Gospels unveil the victim mechanism that has been used since the dawn of time, where the Bible is unique in its disclosure of showing a God who stands shoulder to shoulder with all victims unjustly accused. The Gospels unmask violence by following its roots that are thrust deep into the mimetic contagion of original sin. “Only the Gospels denounce the founding violence as an evil that should be renounced. Only the Gospels put the blame not on the victim, but on the violent perpetrators. Only the Gospels do not regard the violence as sacred and do not transfigure it. Only the Gospels portray this violence as the vulgar scapegoat

⁶⁰⁸ Swartley, 2000, 319.

⁶⁰⁹ “It is no wonder that Christian thought has perceived mythology as satanic and rejected it. In a sense, the gods of mythology are the product of Satan.” Girard, 2001, xiv.

⁶¹⁰ Girard, 1986, 108.

phenomenon that it is, the fruit of mimetic contagion. Only the Gospels reveal the founding murder as a fruit of humanity's fallen state, a sin that God alone can absolve."⁶¹¹ Paradoxically, the Gospels that have unmasked the sacrificial fetish of human culture and history, have often been misconstrued by Christians who are often tempted to lapse back into a sacrificial reading of the text. Girard boldly claims that Christians have misunderstood the whole thrust of the biblical data, often attempting to squeeze it back into the straitjacket of a sacrificial understanding and rendition. Christians have often failed to recognize the originality of their own scriptures⁶¹² and Girard claims that it is of critical importance that this sacrificial interpretation of the Passion must be exposed as an enormous and paradoxical mistake.⁶¹³

This category mistake is tragic because it implies that Christianity that began with the impetus of a great revelation has over the course of time relapsed into pre-Christian and sacrificial modes of existence.⁶¹⁴ This in itself, has often been the catalyst for the Church to adopt violent methods in the mistaken belief that it was perpetuating the kingdom of God through the sword, notably in its military campaigns against heretics, the Crusades, torture and the Inquisition.⁶¹⁵ This elaborate sell out and effective switching to the tactics and arsenal of the other side, is eloquently portrayed in the novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, where the Grand Inquisitor interrogates the returning Christ of the Parousia with a confession of his status as a double agent. The Church has effectively betrayed and abandoned the purity of the original message for the

⁶¹¹ Girard, 2003, 219.

⁶¹² Girard, 1986, 126.

⁶¹³ Girard, 1978, 180.

⁶¹⁴ Bellinger, 109.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 100.

security to be found in mystery, sacrament and sacrifice.⁶¹⁶ Only the kiss that Jesus imparts on the lips of the inquisitor is a lingering legacy of the sign of blistering contradiction, for “the Kiss glows in his heart, but the old man sticks to his idea.”⁶¹⁷ Girard is clear that this ground must be reappropriated, for the demystifying thrust of the biblical data exposes the founding mechanism which stops it from functioning, it breaks the ancient machine of sacrifice. The good news is succinctly this: that scapegoats no longer save men for the persecutors’ accounts are no longer valid.⁶¹⁸ “In effect, this sacrificial concept of divinity must ‘die’, and with it the whole apparatus of historical Christianity, for the Gospels to be able to rise again in our midst, not looking like a corpse that we have exhumed, but revealed as the newest, finest, liveliest and truest thing that we have ever set eyes upon.”⁶¹⁹

The divinity dissociates itself with violence by becoming its victim

The Cross, the pivotal point of sacrificial Christianity, paradoxically has the profound capacity to reveal and expose the device that has lain hidden in human culture by embracing it as a totem. It unmask the twisted and toxic logic that the sacred is grounded in violence and requires the violence of redemptive sacrifice.⁶²⁰ In reality these distorted images are aggressive projections from the realm of the profane that are superimposed onto the divine. Divinity, therefore, must be seen to be cleansed of every act or association with violence, and the only way to successfully accomplish

⁶¹⁶ Dostoyevsky, Fyodor (1974), *The Brothers Karamazov*, Penguin Classics, Middlesex, England, 302-303.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., 308.

⁶¹⁸ Girard, 1986, 189.

⁶¹⁹ Girard, 1978, 236.

⁶²⁰ “To summarize, in the practice of sacrifice a victim’s suffering and death are required, false accusation is believed, divine justification for persecution is affirmed, collective agreement is enforced, and the victim’s voice is silenced. When suffering comes in the course of the Christian life, its character should be the opposite of this. It should arise only by virtue of resistance to all of these sacrificial elements, not because of their acceptance.” Heim, 251.

this is to become its victim. “In a world of violence, divinity purified of every act of violence must be revealed by means of the event that already provides the sacrificial religion with its generative mechanism. The epiphany of the God of victims follows the same ‘ancient trail’ and goes through the exact same phases as all the epiphanies of the sacred of persecutors.”⁶²¹ God has indeed entered into human existence in the person of Jesus but his fate is inevitably one of expulsion and death at the hands of men, for the proverbial lesson of the murderous tenants of the vineyard⁶²² is germane to all human culture. Jesus is the supreme scapegoat because he is the most innocent, “they hated me without cause”,⁶²³ where his mere existence is a threat to the status quo of a world structured on violence, for evil seeks his destruction for no other reason than because he is good.⁶²⁴ Jesus becomes the Crucified Scapegoat par excellence immortalized in the words of the High Priest Caphias: “You know nothing at all; you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish.”⁶²⁵ God embraces the Scapegoat mechanism by becoming the God of victims, thus triggering the classic mimetic contagion and static which now has cosmic significance. “From the anthropological aspect the Cross is the moment when a thousand mimetic conflicts, a thousand scandals that crash violently into one another during the crisis, converge against Jesus alone. For the contagion that divides, fragments, and decomposes communities is substituted a collective contagion that gathers all those scandalized to act against a single victim who is promoted to the role of universal scandal.”⁶²⁶

⁶²¹ Girard, 1987, 159.

⁶²² Luke 20:9-17.

⁶²³ John 15:25, Psalm 35:19.

⁶²⁴ “Evil is not just the devaluation of otherness because the other is scary and bad. Evil is the destruction of the other because the other is *good*.” Bellinger, 95.

⁶²⁵ John 11:49-50.

⁶²⁶ Girard, 2002, 21.

Only Jesus can break the illusion of sacred violence

Only Jesus, a man untainted with false transcendence and disordered mimesis, is capable of liberating humanity from the addictive and cyclical patterns of myth and false religion which has its roots in violence. Only Jesus is capable of breaking free from the usual systems of domination because he has no natural affinity with them, for he neither judges nor distinguishes people in relation to these structures. “To recognize Christ as God is to recognize him as the only being capable of rising above the violence that had, up to that point, absolutely transcended mankind. Violence is the controlling agent in every form of mythic or cultural structure, and Christ is the only agent who is capable of escaping from these structures and freeing us from their dominance.”⁶²⁷ At the heart of every religion is the same central event that generates the mythic thinking that is spawned from the founding murder at the bloody hands of the crowd, a fickle phenomenon, for the crowd that adores yesterday, and may even adore tomorrow, but in a split second transforms its victim into a scapegoat to secure the peace for which the community craves.⁶²⁸ Only if the group’s unity cracks is their any dubiety in the favoured outcome and the cathartic effect may be aborted. Jesus was received ecstatically by the crowd when he entered Jerusalem but the crowd later turned on him in front of Pilate and lusted for his blood.

For Christians there is an obvious obsession with Jesus’ death not because his death is especially unique but because it is typical and representative of all victims slaughtered by their persecutors. There is no intrinsic positive value to the death of Jesus⁶²⁹ as such, the Cross does not endow suffering with significance, otherwise this would

⁶²⁷ Girard, 1978, 219.

⁶²⁸ Girard, 1987, 161.

⁶²⁹ Heim, 246-247.

legitimize the actions of torturers and executioners everywhere. It would mean that God sanctions the violence of sacrifice as a serviceable means for doing business and a desirable model for redemption. It would give some base value to the violent death of innocent victims, where instead it reverses the process and stops it dead in its tracks *because* it is an injustice. Jesus' death is a resistance to scapegoating and not an endorsement of it. "Christians are fixated on Jesus' death and will accept no other like it. The accusation is perfectly correct. To believe in the crucified one is to want no other victims. To depend on the blood of Jesus is to refuse to depend on the sacrificial blood of anyone else. It is to swear off scapegoats. Sacred violence promises to save us from retaliatory catastrophe. But what will save us from sacred violence?"⁶³⁰

The function of the Christian community is to hold its nerve in times of mimetic contagion and to resist the compulsion to make scapegoats from the innocent. To point out the innocence of the victim and remind humanity that it is not a divine mandate. The violent unanimity of the Passion is a direct result of the massive mimetic transference of scandals onto the Cross of Jesus, behind which are the demonic powers who are threatened by Jesus' presence and who seek his elimination. "These powers are always presented as united in their decision to crucify Jesus. This is no propagandistic trick to inflate the historical importance of the Passion. The reference to the Cross is a definition of the powers in terms of the mimetic runaway and founding murder in which they are inevitably rooted even if they have not participated directly in the death of Jesus."⁶³¹ These powers in turn are ceremoniously nailed to the Cross, thereby emptying them of their potency by making them a spectacle, exposing their secret which has lain furtive and hidden in the dark violent

⁶³⁰ Ibid., 195.

⁶³¹ Girard, 2003, 209.

corners of history.⁶³² Sacrifice and its apparatus may be a deluded and failed form of technology but it has always given the temporary illusion of working, for Satan is both a source of order and disorder. Satan casts out Satan to maintain his hold on the dynamics of community life.

Violence is wrong footed and confused when God takes the side of the victim in becoming a scapegoat, because it falls into a trap of its own making and design. Violence tries to cover its tracks and conceal its mechanism by resisting the prying eyes of revelation. But the more vigorously its attempts to bury its secret the Cross routs and reveals its presence. Violence reveals its own game.⁶³³ “Satan himself transforms his own mechanism into a trap, and he falls into it headlong. God does not act treacherously, even toward Satan, but allows himself to be crucified for the salvation of humankind, something beyond Satan’s conception. The prince of this world depended too heavily on the extraordinary power of concealment of the victim mechanism.”⁶³⁴ Every time Jesus opens his mouth he constitutes a real and present danger to the satanic empire by exposing the secret of Satan, and for this reason he must be silenced. Yet it is the word of God that most eloquently entraps the satanic methodology because he gives voice to the victim, he speaks for all those silenced by the brutality of sacrificial injustice. “Either you are violently opposed to violence and inevitably play its game, or you are not opposed to it, and it shuts your mouth immediately. In other words, the regime of violence cannot possibly be brought out into the open. Since the truth about violence will not abide in the community, but must inevitably be driven out, its only chance of being heard is when it is in the

⁶³² “Having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the Cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them.” Colossians. 2:14-15.

⁶³³ Girard, 2003, 183.

⁶³⁴ Girard, 2001, 152.

process of being driven out, in the brief moment that precedes its destruction as the victim. The victim therefore has to reach out at the very moment when his mouth is being shut by violence.”⁶³⁵ And Jesus’ cry from the Cross is a cry which unambiguously indicates that God is on the side of victims.

For Girard, the Cross has elements of deception which were first used by the Church Fathers: Gregory of Nyssa and St Augustine when utilizing the metaphor of a fish hook or mouse trap. Yet although it was St Gregory of Nazianzus and later St Anselm that saw this as a mitigation of God’s dignity through the employment of the art of deception, Girard points out that the deception is rooted in the Devil’s inability to understand God’s true motive in redemption. “The idea of Satan duped by the Cross is therefore not magical at all and in no way offends the dignity of God. The trick that traps Satan does not include the least bit of either violence or dishonesty on God’s part. It is not really a ruse or trick; it is rather the inability of the prince of this world to understand the divine love.”⁶³⁶ The Cross is also a victory⁶³⁷ because it demystifies and neutralises Satan’s craft of the scapegoat mechanism. The passion exposes the demonic lie that lurks at the heart of human culture, that violence even when transfigured through the transformation of cult and sacrifice, has its origin in murder.⁶³⁸ Satan is in effect defeated by the one weapon he could not conceive. By

⁶³⁵ Girard, 2003, 192.

⁶³⁶ Girard, 2001, 152.

⁶³⁷ Girard, 2003, 207.

⁶³⁸ In William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*. A pig’s head is severed and placed on a stake as an offering to placate the unseen but threatening deity on the hill (which turns out to be a dead parachutist). The pig’s head represents a crude sacrificial offering whose pedigree is linked to the collapsing social order of the group of boys, stranded on a desert island, as they descend into savagery. The pig’s head is a euphemism for Satan (Beelzebul, Hebrew for Lord of the Flies: Matthew 12:24) and the primitive violence that engulfs them. “They were black and iridescent green and without number; and in front of Simon, the Lord of the Flies hung on his stick and grinned. At last Simon gave up and looked back; saw the white teeth and dim eyes, the blood and his gaze was held by that ancient, inescapable recognition.....His eyes could not break away and the Lord of the Flies hung in space before him. ‘What are you doing out here all alone? Aren’t you afraid of me?’ Simon shook. ‘There isn’t anyone to

respecting power he is defeated by its opposite, the weakness of the victim, which contradicts the power of satanic self-expulsion.⁶³⁹ The Cross works because it reproduces the founding event of all rituals, where the Passion is connected to every ritual on the entire planet⁶⁴⁰ and can, therefore, undercut it at its source. Only Jesus is capable of throwing off the hold of the founding murder, subverting sacrifice and escaping from the closed kingdom of violence to the breath-taking openness of the Kingdom of God.

To refuse the knowledge that Jesus bears is essentially to refuse that Kingdom⁶⁴¹ and although this has a Gnostic ring it underscores that the victory is one with an eschatological horizon; for the embracing of this revelation leads, albeit temporarily and perplexingly, to an increase in the spasm of violence, as if some great beast was in the final paroxysm of its death throes. “This means that the violence, having lost its vitality and bite, will paradoxically be more terrible than before its decline; as the whole of humanity makes the vain effort to reinstate its reconciliatory and sacrificial virtues, this violence will without doubt tend to multiply its victims, just as happened in the time of the prophets.”⁶⁴² The world may for a time even resemble the man in the Gospels where a vicious demon was driven out only for him to be later invaded by seven others more sinister and pernicious than the first.⁶⁴³ Ironically, it is the Christian Church which has been on the vanguard of concern for victims, principally through

help you. Only me. And I’m the Beast.’ Simon’s mouth laboured, brought forth audible words. ‘Pig’s head on a stick.’ ‘Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill!’ said the head. For a moment or two the forest and all the other dimly appreciated places echoed with the parody of laughter. ‘You knew, didn’t you? I’m part of you? Close, close, close! I’m the reason why it’s no go? Why things are what they are?’” Golding, William (1954), *Lord of the Flies*, Faber & Faber, London, 152, 158.

⁶³⁹ Girard, 2001, 143.

⁶⁴⁰ Girard, 1978, 167.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., 208.

⁶⁴² Ibid., 196.

⁶⁴³ Girard, 2003, 209. See Matthew 12:43-45.

the activity of the Paraclete (the comforter or defender of the accused), which is now criticized by other groups in a competing scrum of victim concern, through a tide of political correctness and mimesis. The concern for victims in society can easily be twisted equivocally into an instrument of power and even into a tool of persecution,⁶⁴⁴ for Satan is endlessly reinventing himself.⁶⁴⁵ For “Satan has a tremendous ability to adapt to what God does and to imitate God, and so Satan - the ancient and tremendous power of the victim mechanism that expels violence through violence - is able to disguise himself and pose even as concern for victims.”⁶⁴⁶

The Triumph of the Cross

The triumph of the Cross is real; Jesus achieves victory paradoxically through succumbing to the violence of the world, tracing it to its source, but then choosing to renounce violence, demonstratively resisting the temptation to retaliate in kind and with a stronger arsenal,⁶⁴⁷ thereby breaking its hold and spell. For this reason there is a deep emancipation from the servitude of redemptive violence that has existed since the dawn of time.⁶⁴⁸ Girard’s soteriology of the Cross may have elements of the Christus victor and moral exemplarist view - with tinges of Gnostic revelation - but nonetheless, this liberation is from all the models of atonement that fostered theories of some secret pact between the Father and Son which operated on a system of brutal sacrificial exchange. Where God’s honour, or justice, or anger was of primary focus where in reality it was the more ubiquitous legacy of human sin which held the key,

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid., 209.

⁶⁴⁵ “And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.” 2 Corinthians 11:14.

⁶⁴⁶ Girard, 2001, xxiii.

⁶⁴⁷ “Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?” Matt. 26:53.

⁶⁴⁸ “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” Hosea 6:6, Matthew 9:13, 13:7.

allied with mimetic contagion, which is really the same thing as Satan.⁶⁴⁹ And although Girard can controversially say that: “we must rid ourselves of the sacred” for the sacred plays absolutely no part in the death of Jesus,⁶⁵⁰ it is not God who dies but our love affair with sacrifice. “What is in fact finally dying is the sacrificial concept of divinity preserved by medieval and modern theology - not the Father of Jesus, not the divinity of the Gospels, which we have been hindered - and still are hindered - from approaching, precisely by the stumbling block of sacrifice.”⁶⁵¹ For in the final analysis it is only love that has the true demystifying power, where Girard reminds us that the love of God is not found in death but life, not violence but peace, and the peace of God which passes all understanding.⁶⁵²

In this chapter ritual concepts such as pollution, purification and sacrifice have been pursued by analysing the social turbulence that is generated at the heart of communities, where social groups get clogged up with negative sentiments that are then projected onto a random scapegoat. Here evil is thrust away, not necessarily through the surgical instrument of the knife, as in the ritual slaughter by the temple priest on the Day of Atonement, but rather in the allied ritual of the scapegoat. Sacrifice averts and expiates where Jesus himself becomes the victim, the highest expression and ideal is now realized, where God allows the sacrifice of His Son in the social ritual of the scapegoat mechanism, not simply to go along with its dark calculus in maintaining social stability and cohesion, but this time to break the machinery of sacrifice for good. Only then can there be a radical opening up of the way, previously blocked by sin, to facilitate a renewed flow of love between God and humanity. As

⁶⁴⁹ Girard, 2001, 150.

⁶⁵⁰ Girard, 1978, 231.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., 235.

⁶⁵² Philippians 4:7.

Turner puts it: “social renewal (exists) through the surgical removal - interiorly in the will, exteriorly by the immolation of a victim - of the pollution, corruption, and division brought about by participation in the domain of social structure. Sacrifice is here regarded as a limen or entry into the domain of *communitas* where all that is and ever has been human, and the forces that have caused humanity to be, are joined in a circulation of mutual love and trust.”⁶⁵³ When God adopts the scapegoat mechanism sacrifice is essentially reversed, where the normal dynamic of violence becomes instead an act of creation and a supreme tribute to God’s power.⁶⁵⁴ The wounds that are inflicted on Christ by agitated human beings are now commissioned, through love and sacrifice, to become healing agents. God takes the initiative and allows these marks to become the signature of redemption, revealing exactly what humanity needs to be redeemed from (sin and its multiple off-spring, *violence*), yet transforms these into wounds of love. “The cure caused by love is to wound and inflict wound upon wound, to such an extent that the entire soul is dissolved into a wound of love. And now ... made into one wound of love, it is completely healthy in love, for it is transformed in love.”⁶⁵⁵ It is to the examination of Christ’s wounds that allegedly have the extraordinary capacity to heal that we must now turn.

⁶⁵³ Turner, 110.

⁶⁵⁴ Bynum, 211.

⁶⁵⁵ Stein, 196.

Chapter 6. Wounds that Heal

The Cross of Jesus props up a man wounded, but these wounds are paradoxically an agent of healing. The thrust of any soteriological enterprise is to capture the essence of salvation, which is fundamentally to escape the evil of pain and suffering.⁶⁵⁶ The whole drama of the history of salvation in the Old Testament is a remorseless flight and Exodus from the pain of servitude and oppression. Yet it is through the wounds of Jesus that liberation is found; as scripture testifies: “by his wounds you have been healed.”⁶⁵⁷ It was Carl Young who commented that “only the wounded physician heals”,⁶⁵⁸ and it was Henri Nouwen who popularised the notion that any authentic pastor had to be a “wounded healer”⁶⁵⁹ in order to be effective, where the very wounds become the locus for God’s intervention and healing activity of grace. “Thus ministry can indeed be a witness to the living truth that the wound, which causes us to suffer now, will be revealed to us later as the place where God intimated his new creation.”⁶⁶⁰ Fundamentally, it is the wounds of Jesus that are the archetypal wounds that heal and are the paradigm for any salvific activity.

Any staurocentric theology which has the crucified Jesus as the focal point of contemplation has to appreciate the mysticism and cult of the Cross, that has arisen in various epochs of ecclesial life. The Cross has always been a trigger for conversion, a

⁶⁵⁶ “The very essence of Christian soteriology, that is, of the theology of salvation. Salvation means liberation from evil, and for this reason it is closely bound up with the problem of suffering.” John Paul II. (1984), *Salvifici Doloris*, The Vatican, Rome, 14.

⁶⁵⁷ 1 Peter 2:24.

⁶⁵⁸ Stoeber, Michael (2005), *Reclaiming Theodicy. Reflections on Suffering, Compassion and Spiritual Transformation*, Palgrave Macmillan Publishers, New York, 30.

⁶⁵⁹ Nouwen, Henri J. M. (1994), *The Wounded Healer*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 82.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., 96.

catalyst to subdue the flesh so as to cultivate the life of the spirit. This often resulted in ascetic practices that punished the body, a warfare between the spirit and the flesh which enlisted the Cross as a piece of equipment for mortification. “This warfare manifests itself in a continuous struggle in which following the example of Christ bearing his Cross is crucial. The Cross brings humiliation, discipline, and chastisement, which means that illness and pain are not merely to be suffered but welcomed as tools for this battle.”⁶⁶¹ This naturally resulted in negative perceptions of the body for it constituted an obstacle to one’s eternal destiny. “The Christian apologist Arnobius declared that the body is ‘a disgusting vessel of urine’ and ‘bag of shite’.”⁶⁶² Only post mortem would the body regain some aroma of sanctity after it had been pummeled by a rigorous Christian life. “The flesh of God’s revered servant, hardened and virtually mineralized by tough vigils and pared to the bones by pitiless dieting, would smell after death as ‘sweet as a perfumed apple’.”⁶⁶³ Gregory of Nyssa’s looking to the Cross was not so much an act of contemplation but an endorsement to follow the Pauline principle of “dying with Christ” and “putting sin to death”⁶⁶⁴ so that through self-control the passions could be curtailed. “As an imitation of Christ’s crucifixion: Looking to the Cross means to render one’s whole life crucified and dead to the world, no longer moved or enticed to any sin....The nail would be the self-control that holds the flesh.”⁶⁶⁵ To imitate Christ is to practise a rustic asceticism based on the Cross, effectively embracing it as a life-style option. “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his Cross and follow

⁶⁶¹ Glucklich, Ariel (2001), *Sacred Pain. Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul*, Oxford University Press, 23.

⁶⁶² Ibid., 27.

⁶⁶³ St Bernard Abbot of Clairvaux, cited in Camporesi, Piero (1988), *The Incorruptible Flesh. Bodily Mutation and Mortification in Religion and Folklore*, Cambridge University Press, 108.

⁶⁶⁴ Romans 6:8, Galatians 5:24.

⁶⁶⁵ Smith, Warren J. (2004), *Passion & Paradise. Human and Divine Emotion in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa*, Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 161.

me.”⁶⁶⁶ This was taken quite literally in some monastic enterprises. “Brothers, gaze upon the Cross; if you choose to dwell here you will be nailed to it. You will have to abandon your own self-will entirely and you will be deprived of every liberty; even the right to eat or fast, sleep or wake will be taken from you. You will never see your family home again.... You will be a prisoner from a stronghold from which there is no escape.”⁶⁶⁷ This is reaffirmed in the work of Thomas à Kempis *The Imitation of Christ*, who alerts his readers to the ubiquitous fact that you can never escape the Cross; it awaits you wherever you go.⁶⁶⁸ However, although the Cross is at the centre of any robust spirituality it has to be said that what takes place on the Cross is not suffering for suffering’s sake. God is not a sadist who takes delight in inflicting pain. “This God of the Cross is not the ‘great huntsman’ who sits over man’s conscience like a fist on the neck. Anyone who understands God in this way misuses his name and is far from the Cross.”⁶⁶⁹ Yet neither is God a bystander who is uninvolved in the events of the death of his Son. To what extent is God affected by the passion and to what extent is it legitimate to say that God suffers, for as some would say “only a suffering God can help”,⁶⁷⁰ has to be rigorously tested. However, clearly it is through a suffering Messiah, and precisely by means of this suffering, that we are healed and salvation won. The Cross reminds us that God takes seriously the pain of the world and binds its wounds from the inside.

⁶⁶⁶ Matthew 16:24.

⁶⁶⁷ Hutchison, Carole A. (1989), *The Hermit Monks of Grandmont*, Cistercian Studies Series, Kalamazoo, 121.

⁶⁶⁸ Kempis, Thomas à (1952), *The Imitation of Christ*, Penguin Books, London, 85.

⁶⁶⁹ Moltmann, Jurgen (2001), *The Crucified God*, SCM Classics, London, 223.

⁶⁷⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer cited in Moltmann, 43.

It has often been said, that the Gospel of Mark and the other synoptic gospels are really passion narratives with an extended introduction,⁶⁷¹ Passion mysticism became predominant in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries where there was a shift away from a focus on the atonement as victory and ransom and even Anslem's satisfaction theory; to an appreciation of the humanity of Christ. Christ's wounds became a source of contemplation, sustenance and healing.⁶⁷² This manifested itself into flowering spiritualities that concentrated on the medicinal qualities of Christ's sacred and saving blood. Julian of Norwich⁶⁷³ and her *Revelations of Divine Love* illustrates a trend in medieval piety that focused on the wounds of Christ which can be mystically entered into,⁶⁷⁴ and are in themselves organically linked to the Mass. Christ was immolated on the altar of the Cross and this was accessible on the altar of every parish church. His blood as saving victim flowed sacramentally to renew and nourish the Church and all believers.⁶⁷⁵ Some mystics (such as the Italian tertiary, Angela of Foligno d.1309) went so far as to fantasise about drinking Christ's blood directly from his open wounds.⁶⁷⁶ To meditate on the Passion became a particular devotion of the peasant, the sick and the dying. The Byzantine portraits of the conquering Christ and Christ as ruler of the universe (Pantocrator) were supplanted by images of the poor Christ, the man of sorrows whose twisted corpus and face etched with pain and bloody wounds were evident for all to see. The picture of Christ on the Cross painted by the German artist Matthias Gruewald,⁶⁷⁷ as an altarpiece for the monastery at Isenheim in Alsace,

⁶⁷¹ Kahler Martin, cited in Achtemeire, Paul J. (1975), *Mark, Proclamation Commentaries*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 82.

⁶⁷² Glücklich, 83.

⁶⁷³ 1342 – 1416.

⁶⁷⁴ Norwich, Julian (1998), *Revelations of Divine Love*, Penguin Classics, London, The long Text 24, 76.

⁶⁷⁵ Gorringer, Timothy (1996), *God's Just Vengeance. Crime, Violence & the Rhetoric of Salvation*, Cambridge University Press, 107-108.

⁶⁷⁶ Petroff, Elizabeth, Alvida (1994), *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism*, Oxford University Press, New York / Oxford, 204-19.

⁶⁷⁷ 1460 – 1528.

is a classic representation of this which celebrates the acute suffering, tragedy and pain of human existence. Cripples and the sick were placed before graphic representations of the crucifixion. There was an obvious solidarity and affinity with suffering with the wounded Christ, yet the difference lay in the realization that Christ's wounds are "wounds of love" that have the power to heal.⁶⁷⁸ "It can be summed up by saying that suffering is overcome by suffering, and wounds are healed by wounds. For the suffering in suffering is the lack of love, and the wounds in wounds are the abandonment, and the powerlessness in pain is unbelief. And therefore the suffering of abandonment is overcome by the suffering of love, which is not afraid of what is sick and ugly, but accepts it and takes it to itself in order to heal it."⁶⁷⁹

The signature of Christ after his crucifixion is inextricably linked to the wounds he received. Jesus retains forever in his risen body the marks of the wounds of the Cross in his hands, feet and side.⁶⁸⁰ Such is the significance of these holy wounds that any mystic, or saint in the making, could use it as a reliable guide to discern any diabolic deception, for the risen Jesus is *always* known by his wounds. "For example, recall the legend of Martin of Tours who, when visited by a glorious figure in a vision who claimed to be Jesus, asked the figure to show Martin the scars on his body. The figure disappeared, it is said, and Martin knew he had been visited by the Devil."⁶⁸¹ Thomas Merton in his book *Bread in the Wilderness* has an opening chapter "Le Devot Christ", and describes the potency of a particular image and representation of a carved crucifix, pictures of which adorn the book throughout. It is of a crucifix that has been

⁶⁷⁸ "The Wounds of Love are the openings of Grace." Ward, Graham cited in Gibbs, Robert & Wolfson, Elliot R. (Editors) (2002), *Suffering Religion*, Routledge Publishers, London, 177.

⁶⁷⁹ Moltmann, 42.

⁶⁸⁰ John Paul II, 25.

⁶⁸¹ Farwell, James (2005), *This is the Night. Suffering, Salvation, and the Liturgies of Holy Week*, T&T Clark, New York, 126.

venerated for centuries in a chapel adjoining the Cathedral of Perpignan, in the south of France that powerfully expresses the suffering of Christ on the Cross. “This is indeed the Christ whom the prophet Isaias described as a twisted root laid bare to the sun on the parched rocks of the desert. This is truly the Christ of whom Isaias cried: ‘There is no beauty in Him nor comeliness and we have seen Him and there was no sightliness that we should be desirous of Him, despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity.... Surely he hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows, and we have thought Him as it were a leper, and one struck by God and afflicted.’”⁶⁸² The celebration of suffering as a redemptive motif in art is characteristically most striking. Religious art that depicts the crucifixion has often quite realistically been able to capture the true horror of Christ’s death. For Jesus’ death was in no way poetic, unlike Socrates who nursed a chalice of hemlock and would die urbane discussing the finer points of philosophy, Jesus’ last words from the Cross were less coherent and better summed up as a scream.⁶⁸³ Yet Jewish theology reminds us that the proximity of death is paradoxically often linked with God’s favour and redemption itself. It is a sign of homecoming, as alluded to in a *midrash*: “‘The Lord shall answer you in the day of trouble’ (Psalm 20:2). This is comparable to a father and his son who were walking along, and the son became tired. He asked his father, ‘Where is the city?’ He replied: ‘my son, let this be a sign for you: if you see a cemetery, know that you are close to the city.’ Thus says the Holy

⁶⁸² “This crucifix is held to be miraculous, to grant many favors to those possessed of pure devotion. And there is a legend about Him. The bowed head is said to fall, each year, a fraction of an inch towards the chest. The Catalans say that when the chin finally comes to rest upon the chest, it will be the end of the world.” Merton, Thomas (1954), *Bread in the Wilderness*, Hollis & Carter, London, ix – x.

⁶⁸³ Fiddes, Paul S. (2002), *The Creative Suffering of God*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 194.

One, ‘blessed be he, to Israel: If you see that troubles envelop you, at that moment you are redeemed.’”⁶⁸⁴

The Cross has always been seen as a suffering symbol, although it has associations with death, the underdog of history has always been able to look to it for inspiration, as it often graphically depicted their own predicament. Slaves especially identified with Jesus⁶⁸⁵ as they lived in a world that rapaciously robbed them of their dignity. The roots of the Cross are planted deep in a *sitz im Leben* that reserved crucifixion as punishment for rebellious slaves. Although it is said that the Persians invented it⁶⁸⁶ the Romans reserved it, although not exclusively, for political and military crimes. Crucifixion, was always dished out to the lower classes, whilst the upper class could reckon on more humane punishments. Slaves were often feared for their potential to rebel and any uprising was swiftly crushed. The old custom of executing all the slaves of a household in the event of the murder of their master was revived in the time of Nero by decree of the senate. Any slave could expect the death penalty if caught even on the flimsy pretext of consulting an astrologer to determine the fate of the emperor, or asking similar questions about the future prosperity of his master.⁶⁸⁷ In military campaigns or larger slave rebellions the Cross was brought to bear. What is significant is that the Cross became synonymous with penal sentences reserved for slaves and violent criminals, where the method of execution ensured the maximum torture and humiliation of the victim. It became a sign of shame, the “terrible cross”,

⁶⁸⁴ Cohn-Sherbok, Dan. (Editor) (2005), *Holocaust Theology: A Reader*, University of Exeter Press, U.K., 102 (*Midrash Shoher Tov* 20).

⁶⁸⁵ Moltmann, 44.

⁶⁸⁶ “As a rule, books on the subject say that crucifixion began among the Persians. However, according to the ancient sources crucifixion was regarded as a mode of execution used by barbarian peoples generally, including the Indians, the Assyrians, the Scythians and the Taurians. It was even used by the Celts.” Hengel, Martin (1986), *The Cross of the Son of God*, SCM Press, London, 114.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

the “barren” or “criminal wood” the “infamous stake”.⁶⁸⁸ It efficiently preserved the status quo and kept law and order through a spectacle of fear. The naked victim was displayed often at prominent places, at crossroads or high points, to act as a gruesome deterrent; an effective means of breaking the will of an occupied people.⁶⁸⁹ From a judicial point of view the form of execution would vary in its method of cruelty and ingenuity, where the caprice and sadism of the executioner was given free reign. The Cross could be used to display the corpse of either a dead or dying man. “Seneca’s testimony speaks for itself: I see crosses there, not just of one kind but made in many different ways: some have their victims with head down to the ground; some impale their private parts; others stretch out their arms on the gibbet.”⁶⁹⁰ The overall effect was to rob the victim of their dignity as well as to maximize pain. Their bodies became food for birds of prey and the pickings of dogs, for many of the victims were never buried, a grave insult in the ancient world. Decaying corpses left unburied would become a particular affront to any Jew of Judea, as death was considered a contaminant.⁶⁹¹ All executions took place outside the city walls as a matter of course to separate the living from the dead. There is some evidence to suggest, however, that under subsequent persecutions by Nero, Christians were ritually killed as sport in the arenas and their bodies fixed to crosses and then covered in tar and used to light up public places after dark.⁶⁹²

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., 99.

⁶⁸⁹ Morna Hooker points out that crucifixion was used almost exclusively as a punishment for men where there are only a few references to women being crucified. “No doubt the humiliation involved in crucifixion seemed peculiarly appropriate for men who were being stripped of all pretence to power”. Hooker, 52.

⁶⁹⁰ Hengel, 117.

⁶⁹¹ Deuteronomy 21:22.

⁶⁹² Hengel, 118.

The consequence of this was that Crucifixion became an infamous means of penal execution synonymous with servitude and social failure, which deeply hampered the early Christian's missionary activity. When Paul said: "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles",⁶⁹³ this wasn't just a piece of hyperbole but a grim reminder that the Cross was not an obvious didactic tool or instantly recognized as a symbol of salvation. In fact it was just the opposite: a highly offensive article of faith that was a burden to preaching, madness to Roman and Greek audiences alike. "An alleged son of God who could not help himself at the time of his deepest need"⁶⁹⁴ and who rather required his followers to take up the Cross, was hardly an attraction to the lower classes of Roman and Greek society. People were all too aware of what it meant to bear the Cross through the city and then to be nailed to it and they feared it; they wanted to get away from it."⁶⁹⁵ For this reason one of the earliest depictions of the crucifixion scene is of an anti-Christian graffito taken from the Palatine, which is of a caricature of a crucified figure with an ass's head with the inscription "Alexamenos worships God". Not until the empire stopped using the practice of crucifixion could the Cross finally be rehabilitated as an acceptable object of devotion and seen as a key to salvation.⁶⁹⁶

The centrality of the Cross in the Christian religion ensures that there is no evasion of suffering, no denial of the reality of the pain of the world, and no escape into the nirvana of enlightenment. There is a stark realism embedded in the Christian faith that reassures the human person that God has entered their situation and experienced woundedness and mortality close up. "The Christian faith relates to suffering not

⁶⁹³ 1 Corinthians 1:23.

⁶⁹⁴ "He saved others but cannot save himself." Mark 15:31.

⁶⁹⁵ Hengel, 154.

⁶⁹⁶ Murphy, George L. (2003), *The Cosmos in the Light of the Cross*, Trinity Press International, Harrisburgh, PA, 27.

merely as remover or consoler. It offers no ‘supernatural remedy for suffering’ but strives for ‘a supernatural use for it’. A person’s wounds are not taken from him. Even the risen Christ still had his scars.”⁶⁹⁷ There is no avoidance of the reality of a world where suffering can be an existential feature that blunts the senses and debilitates the ego to the point of disorientation and extinction. The Cross is a reminder that God goes to the most extreme point of the world, the point in most need of healing, without shifting the ground and seeking an escape. C.S. Lewis articulates the all too human desire to flee from suffering: “When I think of pain - of anxiety that gnaws like fire and loneliness that spreads out like a desert, and the heartbreaking routine of monotonous misery, or again of dull aches that blacken our whole landscape or sudden nauseating pains that knock a man’s heart out at one blow, of pains that seem already intolerable and then are suddenly increased, of infuriating scorpion-stinging pains that startle into maniacal movement a man who seemed half dead with his previous tortures - it ‘quite o’ercrows my spirit’. If I knew any way of escape I would crawl through sewers to find it.”⁶⁹⁸ However, to exclude the possibility of suffering would be to exclude life itself,⁶⁹⁹ and although Jesus was in solidarity with us and freely experienced maximum pain because he suffered for all sins at once,⁷⁰⁰ we must still ask the fundamental question does God suffer? Is there change in God? Does the Father suffer as the Patripassian and Theopaschite controversies, of the early third and sixth centuries,⁷⁰¹ debated within the Church?

⁶⁹⁷ Soelle, Dorothee (1975), *Suffering*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 155.

⁶⁹⁸ Lewis, C.S. (1940), *The Problem of Pain*, Harper Collins Publishers, London, 105.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., 25.

⁷⁰⁰ Aquinas, Thomas (1965), Edited. T. A. Murphy, *Summa Theologiae*, Volume 54 (3a. 46 – 52) *The Passion of Christ*, Blackfriars, London, Question 46 article 6, 27.

⁷⁰¹ “From 519 there was also the controversy about the expression ‘one of the Trinity Suffered’”. Kung, Hans (1987), *The Incarnation of God*, Cross Road Publishing, New York, 524.

The Crucified God

These are hard questions and go to the core of any soteriological method. Any theology of the Cross is bound to be controversial for it must focus on our knowledge drawn from the suffering Christ in his humiliation, or as Luther would say a *Theologia Crucis* rather than a *Theologia Glorae* (knowledge gleaned from the realm of human reason and natural theology). Yet the Fathers and the scholastics of the Church also had a unique contribution to play in assessing the significance of the Crucifixion and spelling out the parameters of what was permissible to say. “Thus because of its subject, the theology of the Cross, right down to its method and practice, can only be polemical, dialectical, antithetical and critical theory. This theology is ‘itself crucified theology and speaks only of the Cross’ (Karl Rahner). It is also crucifying theology, and is thereby liberating theology.”⁷⁰² It raises questions on God’s participation in the Crucifixion, his ability to be compassionate and fundamentally his ability to save, rather than simply treading over the corpses of history with detached indifference. It was the historical situation in the early part of the 20th century, with the acute suffering caused by the Industrial Revolution and the decimation of troops in World War I that created the fertile ground for which notions of the passibility of God could first sprout.⁷⁰³ It was theologians, primarily inspired from a Lutheran confession that embraced the notion that not only did God suffer but there was forever a Cross in the heart of God. “A theology of the Cross which understands God as the suffering God in the suffering of Christ and which cries out with the godforsaken God, ‘My God, why have you forsaken me?’ For this theology, God and suffering are no longer contradictions, as in theism and atheism, but God’s

⁷⁰² Moltmann, 66.

⁷⁰³ Weinandy, Thomas G. (2000), *Does God Suffer?* T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 2.

being is in suffering and the suffering is in God's being itself, because God is love. It takes the 'metaphysical rebellion' up into itself because it recognizes in the Cross of Christ a rebellion in metaphysics, or better, a rebellion in God himself."⁷⁰⁴ The theological stakes are thus high in the quest to establish whether God himself suffers in the very wounds of Christ.

The most radical notion of all is that not only did God suffer on the Cross but God in some way died. It was Hegel rather than Nietzsche who coined the phrase that "God is dead" which is still the fashionable position amongst contemporary atheists or nihilists. It is often the presence of evil in the world, both moral and natural, and the suffering of the innocent that atheists point to in order to prove the indifference, non-existence or death of God. Yet those who survived the Holocaust or *Shoah* rarely adopted this position. "'How strange', Wiesel stated, 'that the philosophy denying God came not from the survivors. Those who came out with the so-called God is Dead theology, not one of them had been in Auschwitz.'"⁷⁰⁵ The current trend of the God-is-dead theologians has now been tempered and replaced with more fashionable Theopaschite tendencies. God suffers and he is changed by the process which lends credence to any theodicy because it goes some way to let God off the hook, he becomes a victim as weak and vulnerable as us to the vicissitudes of life. However, it is not God who dies on the Cross but rather the death of death, the cancelling out of non-being⁷⁰⁶ replaced with the embracing and resurgence of life. "God has died, God

⁷⁰⁴ A. Roy Eckardt, cited in Astley, Jeff; Brown, David & Loades, Ann (2003), *Problems in Theology. Evil: A Reader*, T&T Clark, New York, 17.

⁷⁰⁵ Kepnes, Steven cited in Stoeber, 38.

⁷⁰⁶ "Such a God is therefore supremely immutable, in contrast to human transience, our dust-like frailty, and sinful corruption, our perilous dangling over the canyon between being and non-being, and our final subjection to the grave. So if God and perishability are to be thought together, the imperishable, metaphysically conceived God must die." Lewis, Alan E. (2001), *Between Cross and Resurrection, A theology of Holy Saturday*, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 244.

is dead - this is the most appalling thought, that everything eternal and true is not, and that negation itself is in God; bound up with this is the supreme pain, the feeling of the utter absence of deliverance, the surrender of all that is higher. However, the course of events does not grind to a halt here; rather a reversal now comes about, to wit, God maintains himself in this process. The latter is but the death of death. God arises again to life.”⁷⁰⁷ The Cross is a stark symbol of death and yet a gateway to life, and rejuvenation.

The Impassibility of God

Any discussion about whether the impassible God is wounded on the Cross of Jesus has to be linked to notions of God’s attributes. Modern psychological insights push us towards an understanding of God that must be compassionate, who suffers with us sympathetically, for that is the nature of love and especially sacrificial love. Love enters into the emotional world of another.⁷⁰⁸ Consequently, if God loves we can conclude that he must also suffer.⁷⁰⁹ Yet this position is a radical overhaul of prior conventional understandings of God. God has classically been perceived with a cluster of attributes that underscore his dissimilarity to us. He is known to be: incomprehensible, ineffable, incorporeal, immutable, incorruptible, imperishable, simple (indivisible), free, eternal, self-existing and perfect. In short God is pure act and pure being; nothing can be added to his goodness and nothing taken away. God acts and is not acted upon, whereas all creatures participate in God’s being in virtue of their creaturely status, but God is radically *unlike* his creatures and not dependent on

⁷⁰⁷ Hegel, G.F.W. (1968), *Philosophy of Religion*, Routledge, London & New York, XIV, 167.

⁷⁰⁸ “Either God sympathizes and then he suffers, or God does not suffer and then he does not sympathize or care.” Gavriluk, Paul (2004), *The Suffering of the Impassible God. The Dialectics of Patristic Thought*, Oxford University Press, 8.

⁷⁰⁹ Fiddes, 2002, 16-17.

them in any way. He is transcendent and does not suffer change because he is perfect. Furthermore, creation is always incomplete, either in a state of decay or becoming, whilst only God is always “fully actualized being”.⁷¹⁰ The criticism of this understanding is in part a result of an alleged process of chronic Hellenization of Christian Theology early on. This insight was a result of Adolf von Harnack’s⁷¹¹ theory of the development of dogma in relation to Greek philosophy. It was assumed that the early Church Fathers made raids on the ideas of the philosophers (in particular Plato), and uncritically imported these notions into mainstream theism, thereby corrupting and distorting the Gospel.⁷¹² The God of the Philosophers became the God of the Christians, where the notion of God’s impassibility ensured that God was apathetic with no room for divine emotions. He stands cold and remote from history immune from any suffering, complete in his own self-isolation. This was clearly antithetical and an obvious contradiction to the God of the prophets and apostles; the God of the Bible, a God of pathos who was deeply involved in history and human affairs, which climaxed in the most intense way in the life and suffering of Jesus.⁷¹³

However, although patristic thought embraced the notion of impassibility⁷¹⁴ it wasn’t automatically incompatible with the idea that God had certain positive emotional states such as love, mercy and compassion. Impassibility operated more as an “apophatic qualifier”⁷¹⁵ saying more of what God is *not* rather than what he is. It efficiently and effectively ruled out passions and emotions that were unbecoming of

⁷¹⁰ Smith, 27.

⁷¹¹ 1851-1930.

⁷¹² Gavriilyuk, 3.

⁷¹³ Ibid., 2.

⁷¹⁴ “Philo, of Alexandria (20 BC-AD 40) as is well known, is the first to write a treatise on the immutability of God. There he argued that unlike unstable creation, ‘the Existent’ is ‘firm’ in his existence. He is ‘incorruptible’, ‘imperishable’, ‘everlasting’, ‘endowed with all the virtues, and with all perfection, and with all happiness.’” Weinandy, 2000, 75.

⁷¹⁵ Gavriilyuk, 16.

the divine nature, such as greed, lust and to a certain extent anger, for which the early dispute with Marcionism⁷¹⁶ came to typify. “In apophatic theology impassibility was first of all an ontological term, expressing God’s unlikeness to everything created, his transcendence and supremacy over all things, rather than a psychological term implying the absence of emotions. In this conceptual framework divine impassibility safeguarded God’s undiminished divinity and transcendence.”⁷¹⁷ Affirming divine impassibility, therefore, was perfectly consistent with God’s providential care for the world and his direct involvement in history. It simply meant that God was radically *unlike* the anthropomorphic Gods of mythology, and that any language used of God had to be couched in the more guarded semantics of analogy.

Impassibility protected the transcendent otherness of God and denied him aspects of negative changeability that would make him part of the created order. It did not prevent him from being loving and caring in his goodness for his creation. “Contemporary critics of God’s impassability argue that for God to be impassible means that he is unloving. This is not so. They forget that to say that God is impassible does not tell us something positive about God.”⁷¹⁸ Furthermore, biblical language with a negative nuance such as anger, jealousy or sadness do not necessitate fluctuations in God’s goodness but are more indicative of a change in the experience of that goodness. They are neither projections of emotions onto God but rather reflections of how human beings stand in relation to God vis-à-vis their own justification and righteousness. More simply put, it is a manifestation of God’s consistent fidelity and love. “Is God not saddened by man turning from him and his

⁷¹⁶ “Marcion (d.160) objected to the use of the Old Testament in the Church primarily on theological grounds. He taught that the deity of the Old Testament was cruel, warlike, inconsistent, and merciless and consumed with the passion of anger.” Gavriluk, 53.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid., 49.

⁷¹⁸ Weinandy, 2000, 94.

love? If one understands sadness and pain as due to a lack of good and to the presence of evil, then God is not sad in this sense.....but sadness could be predicated of God, not as a change in God, as the loss of a good possessed, but as an aspect of his almighty and all-consuming unchangeable love for his creatures.”⁷¹⁹ Sadness and anger are, therefore, realities in God not as fickle mood swings but rather indicative of the consistency and splendour of God’s providential care. Sorrow and grief can be legitimately attributed to God, but only by metaphorically referring to his response to evil and sin in the world. It does not necessarily indicate a passible divine nature without qualification.

Does God change?

The biggest charge against God’s impassibility is that if he is unable to change and experience suffering like us, not only is he indifferent⁷²⁰ to the world and its pain, but he is also locked in a static self-existence which is anything less than perfection. Yet for anything to change suggests that there is a potentiality, a possibility, and for God to acquire any more perfections would be a contradiction, it would place him in the realm of finite reality.⁷²¹ Humans change because it is part of their make-up and state of imperfection. They are in a process of becoming and change to a greater or lesser degree by participating in the fullness of God’s life. “The human soul, far from being static in nature, is hardwired for dynamic development. Thus it is capable of the change requisite for life in a body that is to be transformed in the resurrection, but

⁷¹⁹ Weinandy, Thomas G. (2002), *Does God Change?* Studies in Historical Theology, St. Bede’s Publications, 79-80.

⁷²⁰ Some say: “complacent or egocentric”. See Fiddes, 2002, 170.

⁷²¹ Psalm 101 26-28.

also that can grow as the character of its participation in God changes.”⁷²² For God to change and experience suffering would also suggest that evil is in the heart of God because evil classically understood is a privation of the good,⁷²³ a limitation, a lack of perfection. To suggest that God changes, and thus suffers, is to ontologically blur the distinction between God the creator and his creatures. It is sentimentally to suggest that God is like us in a reductive and crass anthropomorphic way. The logic of this obviously helps alleviate a negative theodicy implying that God stands shoulder to shoulder with us by sharing our angst; for “if God suffers then he too is a victim and not a torturer.”⁷²⁴ At a more profound level it demonstrates a misunderstanding of the very nature of divine life. Trinitarian existence is the highest intensity and source of all life that there is. God is pure actuality. “God is immutable (according to Aquinas), not because he is static, inert, or inactive, but precisely because he is so supremely active and dynamic, because he is pure act. He is so much in act that it is ontologically impossible to be more in act. Paradoxically God is supremely immutable because he is supremely active.”⁷²⁵

Does God suffer?

God, therefore, has no need to change because the Trinity is the fullest life that there is, the most passionate because the most active.⁷²⁶ The doctrine of Perichoresis⁷²⁷

⁷²² Smith, 147.

⁷²³ *Privatio Boni* a term loosely referring to an absence or “privation of the good,” taken from St Augustine’s *Enchiridion XI*, where good and evil are perceived as being asymmetrical to each other, the shadow side of being. Evil is not a metaphysical entity in its own right but a corruption or deprivation of the good that should be there. Like a wound or disease it is a diminishment or defect of substance; hence pure evil cannot exist as it always rides piggy-back on something that is good in virtue of its own existence. Evil exists only in another but not in itself.

⁷²⁴ Fiddes, 2002, 32.

⁷²⁵ Weinandy, 2002, 78.

⁷²⁶ “Nothing could be further from the truth than the complaint of process thinkers that the God of traditional theology is ‘static’. The divine persons are precisely ‘ecstatic’ in an eternal activity.”

teaches us that the mutual indwelling of the three members of the Trinity, the self-abandonment and yielding into the other with reciprocal and shared penetration, is the most intense form of life that there is. It is suggestive of a divine dance of dizzying and cosmic proportions that bursts forth with life and one that is ecstatically rooted in the passion of love. “As subsistent relations fully in act, the persons of the Trinity are utterly and completely dynamic and active in their integral and comprehensive self-giving to one another, and could not possibly become any more dynamic or active in their self-giving since they are constituted, and so subsist, as who they are only in their complete and utter self-giving to one another.”⁷²⁸ The up-shot of this is that God does not suffer in the sense of experiencing any inner emotional pain, agitation, agony or angst.⁷²⁹ For if God did suffer, he would be something less than the living God, subject to change like us, and would not be worthy of our worship.⁷³⁰ Suffering, however, *is* at the heart of redemption. Although God does not suffer like us, it does not mean that he lacks compassion in the sense of suffering with us, because his love still embraces those who suffer. God hears the cry of the poor and moves out into the world and enters the human condition by way of the Incarnation. Only a God who is beyond a normal dynamic of suffering, which is a diminishment of being, can respond in this way. God does not have to suffer in his divine nature for suffering to be soteriologically significant, for God is still compassionate and experiences suffering in the person of Jesus. “The Church asserted that the Son of God suffered in reality and not in mere appearance; that it was the Son who became Incarnate and suffered, not the Father; that the Son’s involvement in suffering did not diminish his divine

Trethowan, Iltyd. OSB. (1985), *Process Theology and the Christian Tradition*. Studies in Historical Theology, St. Bede’s Publications, Still River, Massachusetts, 118.

⁷²⁷ Latin *circumincessio*.

⁷²⁸ Weinandy, 2000, 119.

⁷²⁹ Ibid., 153.

⁷³⁰ Trethowan, 1985, 121.

status, because the Incarnation was a supreme act of divine compassion and as such it was most appropriate and God-befitting.”⁷³¹ To say that God suffered in the rawness of his divine nature would mitigate the reality of human suffering. For if God experienced suffering in a divine way, it would not be authentic human suffering but would be God suffering as God; but we do not suffer as God but as human beings.⁷³²

Does the Incarnation induce change in God?

God suffering in his divine nature, moreover, would also cancel out the need for an Incarnation in the first instance. If God could experience pain without assuming a human nature it would be unnecessary for him to become Incarnate. “The most noticeable flaw of the theopaschite theory is that if God is, without qualification, capable of suffering without assuming human nature, then both the divine transcendence is put at risk and the assumption of the human nature in the Incarnation is rendered superfluous.”⁷³³ The whole thrust of the doctrine of the Incarnation as crystallised out in the council of Chalcedon (AD 451) is the belief that the divine and human natures exist in a way that does not violate the other but results in their union in one person. The linguistic markers preserve the tension and harmony between the divine and human natures, for they are without *confusion*, *change*, *division* or *separation*. The one person of Jesus Christ is thus both fully God and fully Man. God didn’t *change* into a man and become something else but united himself (hypostatically) to a human nature so that the Logos took on a new mode or manner of existence. “The Incarnational act is not one of local motion or change on the part of the Logos, as if he somehow ‘left heaven’ and ‘came down’ to earth, and changed

⁷³¹ Gavriyuk, 18.

⁷³² Weinandy, 2000, 204.

⁷³³ Gavriyuk, 20.

himself into man. Rather the Incarnational act, the ‘becoming’, is the uniting of a human nature to the very person of the Logos in such a way that the Logos exists as man.”⁷³⁴ The teaching of the *Communicatio Idiomatum*⁷³⁵ meant that it was perfectly legitimate to say in the same breath that Mary is *Theotokos* or Mother of God and that God suffered in the person of Jesus, albeit as some would say when pressed, in his human nature. There is an acceptable interchange of predicates, so that whatever is said about the Logos and the attributes of the divine nature must be predicated of the humanity of Jesus and vice versa. In other words there are not two subjects in Christ. Moreover, it is legitimate to say that God is born, eats, sleeps and dies in the man Jesus. The *Communicatio Idiomatum*, therefore, is not simply a linguistic or grammatical appellation but points to a deeper ontological character expressing something about the reality of Jesus.⁷³⁶ God suffers as the man Jesus.

Kenosis and some heretical considerations

One of the theological speculations that have been brought to bear in an effort to shed light on the idea that God participates in our suffering is the doctrine of *Kenosis*,⁷³⁷ the self-emptying of God inspired by the hymn in Philippians.⁷³⁸ For God to stand in solidarity with the rest of humanity he has to divest himself of his divine attributes so that he can experience the frailty of human existence. The second person of the

⁷³⁴ Weinandy, 2002, 86.

⁷³⁵ The “Communication of idioms” is a Christological term used to describe the transference of attributes appropriate to either the divine or human nature and apply them either to each other, or to the total unitary subject of the Incarnation.

⁷³⁶ Kung, 530.

⁷³⁷ “The divinity is present concealed under the human existence, open only to faith and not to vision, and therefore outside the scope of any theory. The fact that God enters into the hiddenness of his divinity under the humanity, this is what we mean by kenosis.” Kung, 539.

⁷³⁸ “Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a Cross.” Philippians 2:6-8.

Trinity has to literally “restrain”, “abandon”, “empty” or “limit” some aspect of his divine self in order to become man.⁷³⁹ The downside of this evacuation of divinity is the idea that the Logos is now not *fully* himself and appears in some residual and atrophied version; and by implication this means that he is no longer *fully* God, he is God in some mutilated sense. If the Logos squanders his divine identity so as to be able to assume a human nature he can no longer strictly speaking be fully divine. This also compromises God’s immutability, for it suggests that there has been a change in the divine nature. The Christological problem for the kenoticists may have been an ingenious attempt to protect Christ’s human consciousness, and resist the Apollinarianist tendency that Christ had a divine mind and was thus omniscient. Yet with a kenotic Christ you end up with neither a real divinity nor real humanity, but some mutated version. At best it is God restricted, “like a tennis player with one hand tied behind his back”.⁷⁴⁰ Hans Kung reminds us that “Christology must start out in its thinking from the Cross: the full, undiminished divinity of God is active in utter powerlessness, in the death agony of the Crucified, from which no ‘divine nature’ may be removed.”⁷⁴¹

Kenotic Christological theories were first proposed in the early nineteenth century,⁷⁴² although there are kenotic interpretations found in earlier Christian writers and the scriptures themselves. The Hymn found in Philippians 2:5-11 is the seminal text that

⁷³⁹ Weinandy, 2002, 114.

⁷⁴⁰ See Davis, Stephen T., cited in Polkinghorne, John (editor), (2001), *The Work of Love. Creation as Kenosis*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 198.

⁷⁴¹ Kung, 539.

⁷⁴² “The first explicit kenotic theologians were the Germans, Gottfried Thomasius (1802-75) and W.F. Gess (1819-91). Then the theory was defended by a series of able British theologians, including P.T. Forsyth (1848-1921), Charles Gore (1853-1932), H.R. Mackintosh (1870-1936), and Frank Weston (1871-1924)”, and more recently Hans Urs von Balthasar, where kenosis has undergone a renaissance in the last 30 years. Davis, Stephen T., cited in Evans, C. Stephen (editor), (2006), *Exploring Kenotic Christology, The Self-emptying God*, Oxford University Press, 114.

is interpreted with kenotic considerations⁷⁴³ and is a notorious minefield for exegetical interpretation.⁷⁴⁴ However, although some contest the pre-Pauline pedigree of the pericope, most agree that it is from St Paul⁷⁴⁵ who adapted it probably from a fragment of a text already circulating and used within a baptismal liturgical setting of the early Church.⁷⁴⁶ In John 13:1-20 there is the description of a mini-kenosis where Jesus adopts the role of a servant (*doulos*) and washes the feet of the disciples. Although Kenosis as a doctrine is more to do with the ontological character of Jesus, the ethical spin-offs from an understanding of Jesus adopting the role of a servant or slave are obvious; they subvert and overturn the established hierarchical instinct for prestige, and particularly in discipleship. As Stanislas Breton suggests: “The figure of the slave, in such an accused relief, is more than an image that in an iconoclasm of the imagination shatters the idol of power. Yet more than a sign for a new understanding of the things of God, it is a categorical imperative toward life and action.”⁷⁴⁷ The old settled distinctions between master and servant, rich and poor, dominator and oppressed crumble and in their place rises the model of a suffering servant, a saviour who is obedient to death, even death on a Cross. Some would suggest, therefore, that Kenosis is a vivid metaphor for the self-giving quality of the divine love revealed in

⁷⁴³ Other New Testament passages that might support a kenotic theory include Mark 13:31-32; Luke 2:52; John 11:23; Acts 10:38; 2 Cor. 8:9; and Heb. 5:7-9.

⁷⁴⁴ “The Greek verb employed here, ‘*kenoo*’, meaning to ‘empty oneself’, inspired these theologians to consider the idea that, in becoming a human being, God the Son in some way limited or temporarily divested himself of some of the properties thought to be divine prerogatives, and this act of self-emptying has become known as a ‘kenosis’.” Evans, 4.

⁷⁴⁵ “The pericope was a pre-Pauline hymn of Aramaic or Syriac provenance, or even of Judaic-Gnostic provenance and adapted by Paul. I give these theories no credence...The theological milieu of the pericope is thoroughly and inescapably Pauline.” Phelan, M.W.J. (2004), *The Christology of Philippians 2:6-11. An Examination of the Person and Work of Christ*, Twoedged Sword Publications, Waterlooville, 8.

⁷⁴⁶ A theory adopted by Stephen Sykes but one which originated from Ernest Lohmeyer in 1927. See Hick, John (2005), *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, SCM Press, London, 78.

⁷⁴⁷ Stanislas, Breton (2002), *The Word and the Cross*, Fordham University Press, New York, 98.

Jesus to which disciples are called, indeed “it is a good metaphor that becomes bad metaphysics”⁷⁴⁸ when it is taken out of this practical moralistic milieu.

Kenosis has its prefiguring in the Hebrew idea of the *Shekinah*, or God’s indwelling but hidden glory, where in the Old Testament the eternal, infinite God comes down and dwells amongst his people to share their affliction, but through a laborious and drawn out process ultimately delivers them (Exodus 3:7-8). It is from Israelite experiences of God sharing their wanderings as an exile people that rabbinic literature conceived the theology of God’s self-humiliation in his *Shekinah* and ultimate homecoming.⁷⁴⁹ Not only in moments of redemption but at creation itself God withdraws to give space for his creation, equipping it with a volition and relative independence from himself, simply allowing it to be. This voluntary self-restriction thus maximizes the freedom and autonomy of what he creates.⁷⁵⁰ Yet if the strongest and purist revelation of God’s self-giving love is in the Incarnation then this will always remain the best window into the divine nature; for kenotic Christology will lead with a certain logical inevitability to a kenotic theism, although as Karl Barth reminds us (an opponent of kenoticism) “God is always God even in His humiliation”,⁷⁵¹ and again more explicitly: “The kenosis of the Son in the Incarnation is not that he wholly or partially ceases to be the eternal Son of the Father (otherwise

⁷⁴⁸ Hick, 79.

⁷⁴⁹ Moltmann, cited in Polkinghorne, 143.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid., 147.

⁷⁵¹ “God is always God even in His humiliation. The divine being does not suffer any change, any diminution, any transformation into something else, any admixture with something else, let alone cessation. The deity of Christ is the one unaltered because unalterable deity of God. Any subtraction or weakening of it would at once throw doubt upon the atonement made in Him. He humbled Himself, but He did not do it by ceasing to be who He is. He went into a strange land, but even there, and especially there, He never became a stranger to himself.” Barth, 179-180.

the Incarnation would not be a revelation) but that as the Son of God he is also made the Son of Man.”⁷⁵²

For Hans Urs von Balthasar (an exponent of kenoticism), it wasn't in the framework of the Christological doctrine of two natures but rather in the context of the Trinity; where inner-Trinitarian kenosis was reflected in the perichoresis of self-emptying, that demonstrated a self-surrendering love of each member of the Trinity into the other. As he states: “God is not, in the first place, ‘absolute power’, but ‘absolute love’, and his sovereignty manifests itself not in holding on to what is its own but in its abandonment - all this in such a way that this sovereignty displays itself in transcending the opposition, known to us from the world, between power and impotence. The exteriorisation of God (in the Incarnation) has its ontic condition of possibility in the eternal exteriorisation of God - that is, in his tripersonal self-gift.”⁷⁵³

This kenotic self-surrender is God's Trinitarian nature and is the mark of all his outward works in creation, reconciliation and the redemption of all things. Yet the most serious charge against kenoticism is highlighted here if, as a result of the Incarnation, the Son is in anyway considered to be weakened of his divinity, through this voluntary self-emptying. If there is any loss or interruption of the divine fullness of the Son then the charge even of *Tritheism* could be levelled at any kenotic theory. As E. Digges La Touche argues: “If one of the Persons of the Blessed Trinity can be temporarily withdrawn from the intercommunion of the Deity either in respect of the whole or of any portion of His being, Monotheism can scarcely be preserved. The distinction between the Persons of the Godhead becomes at least as sharply individualistic as that between finite personalities. Thus we have no longer one God

⁷⁵² Cited in Crisp, Oliver D. (2007), *Divinity and Humanity*, Cambridge University Press, 149. (Originally from Barth, Karl, *The Gottingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, I).

⁷⁵³ von Balthasar, 1990, 28.

but three Gods.”⁷⁵⁴ The doctrine of the Trinity thus appears to be compromised by a theory of Kenosis and from a Christological point of view, if the Son was at any time lacking in Divine attributes, then strictly speaking he was not co-equal with either the Father or the Holy Spirit; yet the established position of the Church is that the three persons are co-eternal and co-equal with each other at all times.⁷⁵⁵ The Russian Orthodox theologian Sergius Bulgakov, overlooking the allegedly false Latin dogma of the *filioque* comments: “Perhaps the weakest and strangest element of the kenotic theories (e.g. in Gess) is the supposition that, during the kenotic humiliation of the Son, the Holy Spirit stops proceeding ‘and from the Son’, but proceeds from the Father alone.”⁷⁵⁶

The doctrine of Kenosis, therefore, is complex and more nuanced than on first consideration, being more than simply a retraction of divine glory. Although Bulgakov suggests that the Son removes from himself the garment of glory, that is the joy and bliss that proceeds from the love of the hypostatic union, the shared but mutual divinity of the three persons, only to take it up again later. “Christ’s removal of the glory from Himself is precisely His *descent from heaven*. The Son of God, eternally being God, ‘comes down from heaven’ and abandons, as it were, the divine life. His divine nature retains only the potential of glory, which must be actualized anew, according to the high-priestly prayer: ‘And now, O Father, glorify thou me . . . with the glory which I had with thee before the world was’ (John 17:5).”⁷⁵⁷ Christ retains the nature of Divinity for the duration of the earthly Incarnation but not its associated glory. Some would argue, therefore, that there is an inherent ambiguity in

⁷⁵⁴ E. Digges, La Touche, cited: in Evans, 166.

⁷⁵⁵ Hall, cited in Evans, 98.

⁷⁵⁶ Bulgakov, 226.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid., 224.

approaching the Philippian text (2:5-11), pre-loaded with eisegetical considerations, for on closer exegetical scrutiny, there is nothing embedded within the text to suggest that the word empties himself either of his divine nature, or attributes.⁷⁵⁸ Clearly, if the Word ceases to be a member of the Trinity for the period of the Incarnation this would be incompatible with Chalcedonian Christianity, as: “one and the same our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead, the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man”, and as Swinburne suggests, it would even beg the question “who” was in control of the universe when the second person of the Trinity (the Word)⁷⁵⁹ was constrained by the limitations of being human?⁷⁶⁰

The position of kenosis can, therefore, be separated into three distinct articulations of varying vigour. The strongest and most extreme form of an ontological kenosis would be the view that the Word relinquishes all divine characteristics⁷⁶¹ so as to become human, and then takes up his divinity again after the ascension.⁷⁶² Secondly, a functionalist (or quasi-kenotic) account of Christology would be a weaker position which involves the Word abstaining from exercising certain divine properties for a period of time, typically, although not necessarily, for the duration of the Incarnation. On this more subtle view there is a separation of attributes that are considered essential to divinity and those that are accidental, which he could lose or relinquish whilst remaining Divine.⁷⁶³ Thirdly, a divine *krypsis*⁷⁶⁴ position of kenosis, where the

⁷⁵⁸ Phelan, 17.

⁷⁵⁹ “All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” John 1:3.

⁷⁶⁰ “However, that does not mean that *one* of the persons of the Trinity could not freely empty himself of such properties, secure in the knowledge that the Father and Spirit will continue providentially to guide creation and perhaps even secure in the knowledge that he will someday be rewarded by them with the restoration of all the divine prerogatives.” Evans, 213-214.

⁷⁶¹ The Giessen theologians held this view.

⁷⁶² Crisp, 119.

⁷⁶³ Ibid., 124-125.

Word does not relinquish or abdicate any of his divine attributes but they remain concealed. For the period of the Incarnation, the human nature has restricted access to the divine properties (that would compromise being human), and thus they remain hidden.⁷⁶⁵ This would account for Christ's apparent ignorance of certain things.⁷⁶⁶ The Word retains his omniscience but the human nature of Christ clearly does not. Although this position lurches towards a form of Nestorianism as Crisp points out it doesn't *necessarily* have to: "One reason to deny this: it undercuts the unity of the person of Christ and is incipient Nestorianism. But why should this be the case on something like a two minds Christology? The human mind is contained in the divine mind, but the converse is not the case. The divine mind has access to everything in the human mind, but the converse is not the case. This is not clearly Nestorian or unorthodox."⁷⁶⁷

What is important to note is that in conventional creedal Christology the Word assumes a human nature *forever*, there is nothing temporary with his Incarnational state; indeed humanity now has a permanent place in the inner life of the Trinity by virtue of the God-man. This poses problems for any strong ontological kenotic position which would entail the Word giving up certain properties never to take them up again from that moment forward.⁷⁶⁸ This is the standard criticism of kenosis that the earthly Jesus is not really divine, as he has abandoned properties essential to being God. Looking at it from the other end, the glorified logos who is rewarded for his obedience in heaven is not truly human either; for "the criticism too impugns the

⁷⁶⁴ Kryptic (or hidden) Christology; a position advocated by some Lutheran theologians of the Tübingen school.

⁷⁶⁵ Crisp, 149-151.

⁷⁶⁶ Mark 13:32; Matt. 24:26.

⁷⁶⁷ Crisp, 131.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid., 133-134.

orthodoxy of kenosis for those who accept the permanent embodiment and humanity of the Logos. There is (so it is said) a kind of necessary reverse ‘emptying’ in kenosis, where the glorified Logos, on returning to heaven, emptied itself of humanity.”⁷⁶⁹ The evidence from the synoptic gospels, however, clearly indicates that the human Jesus lacked some attributes of God such as omniscience and omnipotence. What is unclear is whether he did not possess them or whether he simply refrained from exercising them. If it is the case following the *krypsis* view that he had these powers but chose not to use them, i.e. feigning ignorance, then he would scarcely be human but rather superhuman. If on the other hand, he lost these properties, even temporarily, he would cease to be unequivocally God.⁷⁷⁰ The problem is compounded when there is speculation over what attributes are considered to be essential for divinity, and those that can be left behind as being accidental and inconsistent with being fully human. “Can we, then, say that the metaphysical attributes of the second person of the Trinity were temporarily laid aside in the Incarnation, whilst the moral attributes were retained - so that Jesus Incarnated the goodness and love, justice, mercy and wisdom of God, but not the divine omnipotence, omniscience, etc.?”⁷⁷¹ Yet these metaphysical attributes are qualities traditionally associated by most people as accruing to divinity, even if they are given the appellation “relative” by some authors. However, this distinction is more fundamentally to do with the misunderstanding between the words *morphe* (form) and *ousia* (essence) of divinity.⁷⁷² Von Balthasar spells out the dilemma and tension within the doctrine of kenosis when he says: “There is a theological truth which mediates between the two irreconcilable extremes: those of,

⁷⁶⁹ Davies, Stephen, T., cited in Evans, 135.

⁷⁷⁰ Hick, 62.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid., 76.

⁷⁷² “Humiliation refers not to the nature (*ousia*) but to the *morphe*, to the divine form, which Christ removes from Himself in the Incarnation. It follows that, although the nature and the form are interrelated as foundation and consequence, they can be separated from one another.” Bulgakov, 224.

on the one hand, a ‘divine immutability’ for which the Incarnation appears only as an external ‘addition’, and, on the other a ‘divine mutability’ of such a sort that, for the duration of the Incarnation, the divine self-consciousness of the Son is ‘alienated’ in a human awareness.”⁷⁷³ The problem that kenosis confronts us with, therefore, seems almost insurmountable.

To recap then, kenosis stipulates that the pre-existent Son descends into our world and in this process abandons the divine privileges of power, glory and splendour (laying aside the relative attributes of divinity) to embrace the limited and fallen state of humanity. Whether this divestment is temporary or through a process of *krypsis* (concealment), it is clear that through the Incarnation the Word takes on, in addition to his divinity, a human nature for the redemption of his people, and not just temporarily for the period of his earthly life but forever.⁷⁷⁴ The second person of the Trinity is constrained by time and space, both geographic and cultural and even adopts the position of a servant. This self-emptying proceeds to further lengths in the embracing of a death reserved for the despised criminal classes; and as von Balthasar reminds us, the word descends further still, to the depths of Hell to taste the very bitterness of Godforsakenness in total abandonment, shorn of all divine attributes and comfort, where He is in total solidarity with us even in death.⁷⁷⁵ This kenotic letting go of the form of God thus does full justice to his humanity, and to the very portraits of Jesus presented to us in the gospels, for it is fundamentally a God in whom we can identify and since he is God he can fully empathise with us.⁷⁷⁶

⁷⁷³ von Balthasar, 1990, 35.

⁷⁷⁴ Crisp, 148.

⁷⁷⁵ von Balthasar, 1990, 148-149.

⁷⁷⁶ Evans, 7.

Yet more than this, not only is kenosis a reflection of the loving self-sacrifice of God which perhaps gives us simultaneously a glimpse into the private world of the Trinity, the purpose is essentially soteriological. The stooping down of God in love results in the very *raising* of humanity and the human condition itself. As von Balthasar clarifies: “Thus we get: the abasement of *God* and the exaltation of *man*, and indeed the abasement of God is his supreme honour, since it confirms and demonstrates nothing other than his divine being - and the exaltation of man, as a work of God’s grace, consists in nothing other than the restoration of his true humanity.”⁷⁷⁷ So kenosis is perhaps best grasped and understood as a pregnant metaphor⁷⁷⁸ that articulates the mystery of God entering his world. Through the Incarnation and the very surrendering of the fullness and power of God, he embraces its very opposite, thereby even managing in the process to set limits to the powers of evil.⁷⁷⁹ This paradox is concisely summarized by Pope Leo I who says: “What he did was to enhance humanity not diminish deity. That self-emptying of his, by which the invisible revealed himself visible and the Creator and Lord of all things elected to be reckoned among mortals, was a drawing near in mercy not a failure in power.... Each nature retained its characteristics without defect, and just as the ‘form of God’ does not remove the ‘form of a slave’, so the ‘form of a slave’ does not diminish the ‘form of God’.”⁷⁸⁰

Much of the early Christological disputes and heretical formulations thrashed out were a genuine desire to protect the impassibility of God. The Docetists resisted the notion that God became man and that the manhood of Christ was only apparent and

⁷⁷⁷ von Balthasar, 1990, 81.

⁷⁷⁸ Hick, 6.

⁷⁷⁹ Power, David N. (2005), *Love Without Calculation. A Reflection on Divine Kenosis*, The Cross Road Publishing Company, New York. 9.

⁷⁸⁰ Pope Leo I’s Letter to Flavian of Constantinople cited in Evans, 144.

not real, an illusion or fabrication of physicality. This was a feature of most Gnostic systems, spurning the idea that God became man so as to sully himself in the worldly mire of corporeal existence. “The central theological intention behind the Docetic reinterpretations of the gospels was to remove a divine saviour from all real involvement with the realm of matter and from participation in fully human life. For the Docetists such a reinterpretation was in part an obvious implication of divine impassability.”⁷⁸¹ Modalism, or the Eastern term Sabellianism,⁷⁸² took the view that God *did* become man but only for a transitory period where Jesus was more or less a mask of God. God appears under three successive modes or manifestations of the one divine being. Although its aim was to underpin monotheism and preserve the unity of Father and Son in the redemptive process, it chipped away at and compromised God’s immutability; its conclusion inevitably led to Patripassianism.⁷⁸³ Here the fault line and connection between Christological and Trinitarian beliefs manifests itself. “It should also be noted that while Patripassianism (early third century) was condemned, the real issue was not that the Modalists attributed suffering to the Father, but rather that they failed to distinguish adequately between the Father and the Son. Patripassianism was primarily a Trinitarian and not a Christological heresy.”⁷⁸⁴

Arius⁷⁸⁵ who gave rise to the unorthodox belief of Arianism provided a solution to a suffering God by teaching that Christ was not fully God, but some sort of lesser or inferior god, the first of all creatures. There was a time “when he did not exist” and although he was not of the same substance as the Father (who was ungenerated) he

⁷⁸¹ Gavriluk, 91.

⁷⁸² Derived from Sabellius (Early Third century) who gave the doctrine its most sophisticated form.

⁷⁸³ “If Christ is God, he must be identical with the Father, then since Christ suffered, the Father suffered.” Richardson, 431.

⁷⁸⁴ Gavriluk, 92.

⁷⁸⁵ AD 256-336.

was an intermediary or subordinate demiurge between God and the world and an instrument of creation. The Logos was thus subject to change and could experience all the humiliations expected of him, birth suffering and death, but without it impacting on God the Father. The council of Nicaea (AD 325) condemned this position by reiterating that the Son was *homoousios* or of the same essence or being of the Father.⁷⁸⁶ (Later translated as “consubstantial” by the Latin fathers). Arius’ God was always perceived as being truly transcendent and impassible, yet as a result a remote and distant figure from suffering humanity. Nestorius,⁷⁸⁷ on the other hand, who gave rise to Nestorianism taught that there were two persons in the Incarnate Christ, one human and the other divine and only the human person suffered. This radical separation of natures led to a division of the person into two subjects (or two sons) so that the unity in Christ was at best a moral or accidental one. This was naturally condemned.⁷⁸⁸ The Church had thus struggled with three main competing systems of thought, all of which had in their own way attempted to avoid the notion that God suffered. *Docetism* had boldly claimed that as Christ was a divine figure he couldn’t possibly have suffered and so his humanity was a charade or pretence; *Patripassianism* lent itself towards the idea that God the Father was temporally changed into the suffering Son, at the expense of his transcendence and the distinction between persons in the Godhead; and finally *Arianism* couldn’t stomach any notion of the supreme God being involved in suffering, therefore, held the view that Jesus was

⁷⁸⁶ As opposed to Arius’ *homoiousios* which meant that Christ was of a “similar substance” to that of God.

⁷⁸⁷ AD 389-451.

⁷⁸⁸ “To say ‘God was born’, or ‘God suffered, died and rose’, not only implied that the Logos was passible in himself, but that he changed in becoming man. The whole of Nestorius’ Christology is articulated to uphold the integrity and distinction of the humanity and divinity, and thus the immutability and impassibility of the Logos.” Weinandy, 2002, 38.

involved in change, birth, suffering, and death, because he was not fully God, and more like a divine ambassador.⁷⁸⁹

The suffering of the impassible God

Classic Christology has ever since stated that Christ's redeeming capacity is linked to his ontology and that God suffered as a man in the person of Jesus. It became central to the understanding of the Incarnation that it was the Son who was of the same essence as the Father who became Incarnate and suffered, and not the Father. At the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, suffering and death was a real event and in no way diminished his divine status. It was, therefore, permissible to say that not only a man but God himself became involved in the transient and mutable conditions of human existence. In others words *the impassible God suffered*. Patristic contributors unashamedly celebrated the fact that God suffered: "Irenaeus speaks of the 'sufferings of my God' and of the 'blood of God'; Melito of Sardis, Tatian and others say that 'God suffered'. Later, Tertullian too speaks of the 'suffering' and the 'blood of God' and even of the 'dead God'; Gregory Thaumaturgus speaks similarly in his work on the 'Impassibility and the Passibility of God'. And the pillars of Nicean orthodoxy also, such as Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria and Hilary of Poitiers, speak of the 'suffering God' or of the 'crucified God'."⁷⁹⁰ This is the paradoxical embracing of opposites, where the infinite becomes finite, the transcendent immanent and the divine human. One linguistic move that became illegitimate and implausible, however, is the notion that God is altered by his Incarnation and his subsequent dealings with the world. Some mistakenly suggest that there is a retroactive impact

⁷⁸⁹ Gavrilyuk, 18.

⁷⁹⁰ Kung, 522.

back into the being of God. Process theologians and others are willing to say that God suffers,⁷⁹¹ and God needs the world to reach his own perfection. For them God is changed by suffering (which is perceived as a good and not as an evil) in order that he is able to reach his own fulfilment. God is essentially in process. “If God fulfils his being through the suffering of creation and redemption, if he becomes more fully himself by pouring himself out in kenotic love for the world, then it seems that the world is necessary for God to be God.”⁷⁹²

Not only is this a blurring and fracturing of the distinction between God and the creature it suggests that God is actually dependent on the world, and not the other way round. In fact God does not create the world *ex-nihilo* in this system but out of chaos, he becomes a sort of co-creator.⁷⁹³ For process theologians, change and being changed becomes the ultimate reality for to be unchanging is to be irrelevant, static and synonymous with death. Without delving into a full analysis of process thought⁷⁹⁴ a bi-polar God, seen as a society of occasions, is involved in history reacting to a series and synthesis of preceding events. These occasions are intuited or “prehended” by God. There is an almost pantheistic and evolutionary thrust in the nature of God who is influenced by the world and can be wounded by its occasions.⁷⁹⁵ “The single principle of prehending, which is but an aspect of ‘creativity’ or experience, as in principle and always, partly active or self-created, utilizing previous events as materials for fresh syntheses, the syntheses themselves furnishing new such materials

⁷⁹¹ Fiddes, 2002, 51, 68, 75.

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*, 57.

⁷⁹³ Trethowan, 1985, 9-10.

⁷⁹⁴ “The founder of process thought was Alfred North Whitehead, an Englishman who was born in 1861 and taught mathematics at the University of London until his acceptance of a chair of philosophy at Harvard. Trethowan, 1985, 3.

⁷⁹⁵ According to Whitehead: “God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification.” Richardson, 468.

and so on for ever - this principle expresses not only how the world hangs together, but also how it depends upon and yet also influences God.”⁷⁹⁶ God is not really separated from the world for “God suffers the consequence of being a participant in the history of the world. Everything that happens enters the divine life as a felt experience of goodness or loss.”⁷⁹⁷ In a very real sense God is somewhat passive, unable to enter into any meaningful and redemptive relationship with humanity in the present. God is reduced to a sort of cosmic memory⁷⁹⁸ where past events are swept up and used as the raw material for further development and change. God is the “great adventurer” who is enriched by the finite where he “lures” or “persuades” the world to fresh possibilities. Suffering becomes a determinative feature of being alive. God romantically, but euphemistically, becomes “the great companion, the fellow sufferer who understands.”⁷⁹⁹

For some theologians like Jurgen Moltmann our history is absorbed by God and internalized by him. The history of God and the history of humanity merge where the depth and abyss of human suffering, epitomized most eloquently on the Cross of Jesus, become one. “All human history, however much it may be determined by guilt and death, is taken up into this ‘history of God’, i.e. into the Trinity, and integrated into the future of the ‘history of God’. There is no suffering which in this history of God is not God’s suffering; no death which has not been God’s death in the history on Golgotha.”⁸⁰⁰ It is true that since Chalcedon one cannot attribute suffering exclusively to the humanity of Jesus alone, otherwise it would threaten the unity of the person of

⁷⁹⁶ Trethowan, 1985, 53.

⁷⁹⁷ Cited in Ibid., 80.

⁷⁹⁸ Gunton, cited in Weinandy, 2002, 147.

⁷⁹⁹ Quoted in Trethowan, 1985 41 & Fiddes, 2002, 43.

⁸⁰⁰ Moltmann, 255.

Christ.⁸⁰¹ Yet it is a radical move to suggest that suffering enters the inner life of the Trinity, unless one adopts the formula “the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity” and vice versa.⁸⁰² Yet Moltmann and others want to suggest that the Cross is a Trinitarian event and has to be interpreted under the hermeneutic of God’s suffering, where one can say that there is forever a Cross in the heart of God.⁸⁰³ Omnipotence appears to be a bar that would limit any experience of the human condition,⁸⁰⁴ whereas for some to suffer and die is not a sign of weakness but a sign of love. Indeed, God is presumed to suffer because not to do so would imply that he was incapable of love.⁸⁰⁵ The Christ event on the Cross thus becomes a God event. The Godforsakenness and cry of abandonment from the Cross⁸⁰⁶ is a tear and rending in the ontological fabric of the divine. It indicates a rebellion or alienation in the Trinitarian makeup. “The abandonment on the Cross which separates the Son from the Father is something which takes place within God himself; it is *stasis* within God - ‘God against God’ - particularly if we are to maintain that Jesus bore witness to and lived out the truth of God. We must not allow ourselves to overlook this ‘enmity’ between God and God by failing to take seriously either the rejection of Jesus by God, the gospel of God which he lived out, or his last cry to God upon the Cross.”⁸⁰⁷ This, according to Moltmann, is what makes Jesus’ Cross unique and distinct from all the other crosses of History. God in a sense passes judgment on himself. Yet at the same time there is also a symmetry of wills between Father and Son in their bifurcation. The Father delivers Jesus up to die Godforsaken on the Cross and the Son responds by

⁸⁰¹ Kung, 524.

⁸⁰² The Trinitarian axiom: “The economic Trinity *is* the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity *is* the economic Trinity”, was first cited by Rahner, Karl S.J. in (1967) *The Trinity*, Crossroads, New York, 25.

⁸⁰³ Fiddes, 2002, 29.

⁸⁰⁴ Moltmann, 230.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid., 237.

⁸⁰⁶ Mark 27:46.

⁸⁰⁷ Moltmann, 154.

giving himself up.⁸⁰⁸ Father and Son are united in their mutual surrender; where the grief of the Father is equal to the death of the Son.

Moltmann can then paradoxically say: “God died the death of the godless on the Cross and yet did not die. God is dead and yet is not dead.”⁸⁰⁹ Death is taken into God’s own life and history.⁸¹⁰ It is the relationality of the Trinity which reveals the eternal cruciform pattern in the divine life. However, Moltmann stops short of trespassing onto territory that is classically perceived as suggesting that God the Father died. “We cannot therefore say here in Patripassian terms that the Father also suffered and died. The suffering and dying of the Son, forsaken by the Father, is a different kind of suffering from the suffering of the Father in the death of the Son. Nor can the death of Jesus be understood in Theopaschite terms as the ‘death of God’. To understand what happened between Jesus and his God and Father on the Cross, it is necessary to talk in Trinitarian terms. The Son suffers dying; the father suffers the death of the Son.”⁸¹¹ Yet language like this, although suggestive of a God in solidarity with us, really only ends up with God as just another victim. Although there is always the qualification that Jesus’ death cannot be understood as “the death of God” but only as the “death in God”,⁸¹² it still suggests a vulnerable God who weeps with us because he suffers like us, because fundamentally *he is* like us.⁸¹³ The distinction between creator and creature is lost. It panders to those who yearn for God as if he were some cosmic teddy bear whom they can always hug in a crisis, someone who will share their angst with them and cry when they cry. “For a God who is incapable

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid., 251-252.

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid., 253.

⁸¹⁰ Lewis, 225.

⁸¹¹ Moltmann, 251.

⁸¹² Ibid., 213.

⁸¹³ It is more orthodox to say that “God suffers in Jesus’ suffering. In Jesus’ death God himself tastes damnation and death.” Kung, 555.

of suffering is a being who cannot be involved; Suffering and injustice do not affect Him. And because he is so completely insensitive, he cannot be affected or shaken by anything. He cannot weep, for he has no tears.”⁸¹⁴ More trenchantly, the idea that there is a rupture between Father and Son, where the relations of the Trinity are stretched to breaking point and finally shatter may be poetic, but not a literal truth; for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are forever united in their eternal career. So to suggest that the Cross is a stake driven into the heart of God has more the character of myth than doctrine about it.

The pain of God

This radical anthropomorphic view does, however, appear to get God off the hook with regard to any deficient theodicy that fails to distance Him from the root cause of suffering. If God *is* implicated in suffering the argument goes, then it must be as victim otherwise he is *de facto* the torturer, for even to be a bystander is to be complicit through apathy. “In the face of suffering you are either with the victim or the executioner - there is no other option. Therefore that explanation of suffering that looks away from the victim and identifies itself with a righteousness that is supposed to stand behind the suffering has already taken a step in the direction of theological sadism, which wants to understand God as the torturer”;⁸¹⁵ and the logical conclusion to any theological sadism is that one ends up worshipping the executioner out of sheer terror.⁸¹⁶ To have a suffering God is a solution that reassures, for it prevents any notions of a brutal or indifferent deity, yet at the same time suggests a God who loves, and what is more radical still, a God who is in pain. Taking Moltmann’s stance to its

⁸¹⁴ Moltmann, 229.

⁸¹⁵ Soelle, 27.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid., 28.

extreme conclusion theologians such as Kazoh Kitamori postulated that God communicates through pain. “In trying to reveal his own pain to us as human beings, God communicates through human pain. To us the bitterest pain imaginable is that of a father allowing his Son to suffer and die. Therefore God spoke his ultimate word, ‘God suffers pain’, by using the Father-Son relationship. Thus the words ‘the Father begets the Son’ are secondary to the primary words ‘the Father causes his Son to die’. This is the theology of the Cross.”⁸¹⁷ So here it is explicitly stated that God the Father is complicit in the murder of his only Son, or at least allows it to happen - in the same genre of the Akedah, or near sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham (in Genesis 22:1-18); only *this* time, God goes through with the homicide.

Here the Trinitarian relationship again is brought into play as a way to articulate the dynamic that is operating in the heart of God. What is projected onto the Cross is revealingly the inner life of the Trinity.⁸¹⁸ Yet this position only seems to endorse suffering, giving it some kind of divine mandate. To suffer is to be close to the divine. To suffer places us on the highway of salvation where our individual wounds are raised to the status of being fruitful, and like God’s pain, will be agents of healing. “By serving him through our pain, the pain of God rather saves and heals our own pain. When the pain of God heals our pain, it already has changed into love which has broken through the bounds of pain ‘the love rooted in the pain of God’.”⁸¹⁹ Yet there is more than an element of truth in the claim that it is through the wounds of Jesus that our healing is accomplished; because the Cross is now elevated to a unique position of

⁸¹⁷ Kitamori, Kazoh (1965), *The Theology of the Pain of God*, Wipf & Stock Publishers, Oregon, 47.

⁸¹⁸ “The meaning of the Cross of the Son on Golgotha reaches right into the heart of the immanent Trinity. From the very beginning, no immanent Trinity and no divine glory is conceivable without ‘the Lamb who was slain’...One can never think of God in the abstract, apart from the Cross of Christ...God is from eternity to eternity ‘the crucified God’.” Lewis, 228.

⁸¹⁹ Kitamori, 53.

mystical significance, for the wounds inflicted become the source of sanctification because they are God's wounds; wounds of love. "Because the pain of God is love rooted in his pain, the mysticism of the Cross creates power for sanctification. This love of God produces ethical sanctification in harmony with the order of the Holy Spirit. Mysticism which has justification as its background produces ethical energy - this is our mysticism."⁸²⁰ This highly charged position suggests that we become one with God in pain, and so to participate in the sufferings of Christ is a privileged channel of divine life or Grace. We are closer to God in suffering because God himself is in pain.

Kitamori can suggest that the inner heart of God is pain,⁸²¹ where the pain of God gives meaning and value to human suffering. The glory of the Cross reflects the radiance of his face, revealing the true nature of God, so that when one looks at the face of suffering in the world, the face of Christ emerges. "But there is something else that hits me hard, and that is the expression on the face of a wounded man enduring violent pain. His face, filthy with dirt, unshaven, and emaciated, would gradually come to resemble in its struggle with pain, as night followed day, the expression on the face of Christ you see in pictures."⁸²² Although this seems unduly masochistic it underscores the notion that Jesus' wounds on the Cross are real, he completely embraces our reality for there is no docetic sidestepping of the cutting edge of crucifixion, yet the pain of God is really the dark side of his love. It is the forgiveness of sins,⁸²³ where the love of God is trying to pierce through his wrath⁸²⁴ which becomes focused on the Cross. For Kitamori, like Moltmann, there is the crude

⁸²⁰ Ibid., 77.

⁸²¹ Ibid., 145.

⁸²² Ibid., 148.

⁸²³ Kitamori, 40.

⁸²⁴ Ibid., 111.

suggestion that God suffers and similarly, like us, somehow dies. Although this cannot literally be true, it does force us to confront the traditional attributes of God and apply them radically to the Cross of Jesus to test their meaning, for “all the old metaphysical concepts of God, along with the axioms of absoluteness, apathy, and immutability, ‘must pass through the eye of the needle of the properly understood concept of the death of God’.”⁸²⁵ It uncovers a mysticism of pain, where through participation in the suffering of Jesus we are healed by his wounds. If God is in any way responsible for our afflictions,⁸²⁶ because of the sort of world he has created, he at least has the solution to what our healing will consist of. He now has first-hand knowledge because he has been wounded like us. “Come let us return to the Lord; for he has torn, that he may heal us; he has stricken, and will bind us up.”⁸²⁷ When the wounds are the most raw and when loneliness bites most deeply, it is then that God’s healing grace is revealed as being most active. God is paradoxically and perversely to be found in the opposite of what is expected; the unexpected encounter of strength in weakness, healing in sickness, life in death. “That self-abandonment, sustaining opposition and negation through sin’s increase, is, in its very impotence, what releases the more abundant increase still of grace, the heightening overflow of divine being which is more present than absent in the midst of godforsakenness and godlessness, which outflanks sin, leaves hate exhausted, and secures the death of death, the negation of non-being.”⁸²⁸

⁸²⁵ Lewis, 245.

⁸²⁶ “This God is the one who caused his own beloved Son to die, the God in pain, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Kitamori, 52.

⁸²⁷ Hosea 6:1.

⁸²⁸ Lewis, 225.

Christianity as a cult of suffering

Christianity has been charged with promoting a cult of suffering,⁸²⁹ but the gospels are laced with a gospel of substitutive suffering where Jesus helps us not because of his power but because of his weakness.⁸³⁰ In Matthew 8:17 it states that this was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.” making it quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his vulnerability and agony. This solidarity with the human condition ensures that God is always with the one who is suffering, and that this in itself offers consolation. God is fundamentally compassionate “ready to forgive, gracious, and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love”; (Nehemiah 9:17) and thus one can jettison any eccentric ideology of suffering that is necessarily linked to punishment.⁸³¹ Yet, it has been a traditional assertion in Old Testament theological endeavour that all suffering is linked to God’s chastisement, where the pious person can take solace in the knowledge that sins are atoned for and guilt purged by the very trade-off with suffering. The Old Testament is littered with notions that suffering punishes, trains, tests and educates.⁸³² However God does not remain aloof but grieves and reaches out in empathy with a theophany to ensure that His divine presence or *Shekhinah* comes to dwell with the children of Israel, even (and most especially) in the place of the thorn bush, which is an emblem of grief and distress.⁸³³

It has been suggested that the one good thing that came out of Auschwitz is that

⁸²⁹ Soelle, 103.

⁸³⁰ 2 Corinthians 12:10.

⁸³¹ Soelle, 102.

⁸³² Ibid., 20.

⁸³³ “‘In all their affliction he was afflicted’ (Isaiah 63:9). When God descended from his heavenly abode to deliver the children of Israel out of the hand of the Egyptians (Exod. 3:8), he came to dwell in the thornbush, an emblem of ‘grief and distress’ since it is ‘full of thorns and thistles’. God’s exchanging his celestial abode for the thornbush signifies his desire to share in the misery of Israel.” Wolfson, Elliot, cited in: Gibbs, 104.

Jewish history has since broken any causal link between suffering and retribution. God does not punish because of one's sinfulness, as the book of Job, who is innocent of all crime and wrong doing, testifies. To link punishment with misconduct real or imagined, would dangerously give credence to regimes of brutality and totalitarianism around the world. "One response that is almost universally rejected by all thinking segments of the community is that the Holocaust is God's punishment for Israel's sin. If the Holocaust accomplished anything, it effectively killed the doctrine of retribution as the key to Jewish theodicies. It may have worked for centuries, but today it is viewed as an obscenity."⁸³⁴ God, if anything, is also in exile and weeps with his people by the rivers of Babylon.⁸³⁵ Religion is a recognition that God offers a consoling presence where the pain of the world, and in particular pain that is considered sacred, is used as a healing agent rather than as a weapon to wield. "In fact *sacred pain* clearly shows that in religious contexts pain is seldom just an aversive force. Pain may be medicine, a test, a rite of passage, or an alchemical agent of inner transformation. Consequently religion can act as consolation, as a challenge, or as a basis for social solidarity and not only as a sword hanging over the heads of sinners."⁸³⁶

Yet the reality is that suffering can be crushing, disintegrating and seen as an enemy. It can equally trigger despair and resentment and even hatred towards God.⁸³⁷ Extreme suffering can destroy the ability to communicate where the afflicted simply cave in on themselves.⁸³⁸ Mystics, martyrs and patients can brace themselves in the

⁸³⁴ Gilman, Neil, cited in Cohn-Sherbok, Dan, 109.

⁸³⁵ Braybrooke, Marcus, cited in Cohn-Sherbok, Dan, 134.

⁸³⁶ Glucklich, 210.

⁸³⁷ Stoeber, 72.

⁸³⁸ "I once visited a psychiatric hospital that was a kind of warehouse of human misery. Hundreds of children with severe disabilities were lying, neglected, on their cots. There was a deadly silence. Not

knowledge that pain can sometimes be sent by God, which if God is kind will induce states of euphoria and even operate as an analgesic to mask deeper hurt. “The martyr and the ascetic regard pain as the phenomenal face of a divine mechanism - retributive and just, while on the other hand, their certainty produces a strange insensitivity to pain. This is true not just for martyrs (with their anaesthetizing adrenal rush) but for patients as well.”⁸³⁹ Yet clearly there has to be a cautionary warning to guide people away from distorted styles of spirituality that seek union with God through pain, for it invariably leads to masochistic and ascetic outlets, rather than anything holy.⁸⁴⁰ However, countless saints down through the centuries have testified to the blurring of the distinction between pain and being wounded by love, even if this was a result of some form of ascetic self-torture. In this process the centre of the self is displaced and the ego melts only to merge with the other who is God. “As the empirical agency gives way to a more highly esteemed reality, the centre of being shifts outward, situating the sense of self in a greater centre of ‘being’. This applies not only to the mystic but to any religious individual - a pilgrim, for example. In the words of one: ‘At one moment everything is pain. But at the next moment everything is love. Everything is love for the Lord.’”⁸⁴¹ Thomas Muntzer, however, alerts us to the fact that suffering has to be embraced for its service to God, otherwise we become the Devil’s martyrs by default. “If you don’t want to suffer for the sake of God, then you must become the Devil’s Martyrs.”⁸⁴² Pain can more often than not be used by the Devil, for it is as an alchemical force that like the forger’s fire has either the ability to transform and enrich the individual to a purer and higher state of being or, simply to

one of them was crying. When they realize that nobody cares, that nobody will answer them, children no longer cry. It takes too much energy. We cry out only when there is hope that someone may hear us.” Stoeber, 92.

⁸³⁹ Glücklich, 17.

⁸⁴⁰ Soelle, 95.

⁸⁴¹ Glücklich, 207.

⁸⁴² Muntzer, Thomas cited in Soelle, 133.

destroy. Unwanted pain can be transformed into something sacred if approached in the right way. “Pain strengthens the religious person’s bond with God and with other persons. Of course, since not all pain is voluntary or self-inflicted, one mystery of the religious life is how unwanted suffering can become transformed into sacred pain.”⁸⁴³

There is great consolation that Jesus suffers like us, and more acutely so because of his innocence, for even to be born into this world is to suffer. It is indeed part of the mysterious depth and nature of the human person⁸⁴⁴ and part of their calling and transcendental destiny to overcome that suffering. Yet Jesus suffers because we suffer; he is in total solidarity with us and for this reason suffering can often be a catalyst for compassion in others. Conversely, it can also be said, perhaps more poignantly, that Jesus suffers *because* of us. In some medieval iconography he displays his wounds to the damned and by insinuation declares that these are the reasons for their own condemnation.⁸⁴⁵ However, Jesus’ mission was in particular perfected through suffering where he learnt true obedience in love.⁸⁴⁶ Suffering has a didactic function for it educates through discipline;⁸⁴⁷ and through that discipline there is a restoration of goodness. As St Paul says: “We rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts

⁸⁴³ Glücklich, 6.

⁸⁴⁴ See John Paul II, 2.

⁸⁴⁵ “The iconography of the Last Judgment in the medieval period commonly shows Christ manifesting his wounds: the means of salvation. (See, for example, the thirteenth-century mosaic in the baptistry of Florence cathedral.) In the later Middle Ages, however, Christ shows his wounds specifically to the damned, as though declaring the reason for their condemnation (as in the fourteenth-century Last Judgment scene attributed to Traini in the Camposanto at Pisa).” Viladesau, Richard (2006), *The Beauty of The Cross. The Passion of Christ in Theology and the Arts - from the Catacombs to the Eve of the Renaissance*, Oxford University Press, 163.

⁸⁴⁶ Hebrews 5:9.

⁸⁴⁷ Hebrews 12:5 -7.

through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.”⁸⁴⁸ Suffering can make one more sensitive to the pain in the world,⁸⁴⁹ or it can make us more suspicious and resentful, either way it changes us and for this reason the true religious project is for pain to be totally transformed into a higher good. “In its relation to pain, the goal of religious life is not to bring anaesthesia, but to transform the pain that causes suffering into a pain that leads to insight, meaning, and even salvation.”⁸⁵⁰ It is precisely through Christ’s suffering that redemption is accomplished, where human suffering is elevated to the level of redemptive significance.⁸⁵¹ Suffering is used by God as an instrument of salvation, as well as an invitation to reveal the moral greatness and spiritual maturity of the human condition.⁸⁵²

The wounds of Christ

The Gospels at their most passionate reveal a Gospel of suffering, but it is precisely at this point that salvation is won, where the wounds of Christ heal at the profoundest level. The Song of the Suffering Servant,⁸⁵³ liturgically used by the Church in the liturgies of the Triduum of Holy week, epitomizes the salvation gained through innocent suffering. These texts are brought to bear for they faithfully portray by way of archetype the redemptive role that Jesus’ suffering acquires. Salvation secured through the Cross is not only remembered but now *all* suffering is swept up into a doxological hymn of praise and thanksgiving, for it becomes the very gateway to

⁸⁴⁸ Romans 5:2-5.

⁸⁴⁹ Soelle, 126.

⁸⁵⁰ Glucklich, 40.

⁸⁵¹ “Many of us are tempted to think that if we suffer, the only important thing is to be relieved of our pain. We want to flee it at all costs. But when we learn to move through suffering, rather than avoid it, then we greet it differently. We become willing to let it teach us. We even begin to see how God can use it for some larger end.” Nouwen, Henri J. M. (2001), *Turn My Mourning into Dancing*, W. Publishing Group, Nashville, Tennessee, xv.

⁸⁵² See John Paul II, 18-21.

⁸⁵³ Isaiah 53:2-5.

paradise. “In the liturgies of the Triduum, all suffering - psychodynamic, physical, emotional, spiritual, economic, political, the suffering that is actively chosen and the suffering that follows from the coming-to-be of human identity - is drawn into the hope of redemption and becomes the doorway to it. Christ enters into our full humanity and draws it all into the saving action of his life of outpoured love.”⁸⁵⁴ Although suffering is still perceived as an evil, God uses it as a mechanism for good where the wounds of the Saviour become the healing agent of salvation, the blood of Christ the elixir of life.

The immolation of the Son on the Cross now becomes a dynamic act revealing the creative character of suffering touching the most vulnerable part of the human condition, where God and humanity meet and where life and death embrace. “The sufferings of Christ created the good of the world’s redemption. This good in itself is inexhaustible and infinite. No man can add anything to it. But at the same time, in the mystery of the Church as his Body, Christ has in a sense opened his own redemptive suffering to all human suffering. In so far as man becomes a sharer in Christ’s sufferings - in any part of the world and at any time in history - to that extent *he in his own way completes* the suffering through which Christ accomplished the Redemption of the world.”⁸⁵⁵ Christ’s suffering, then, is also an invitation for us to participate in his suffering, not only through baptism,⁸⁵⁶ the rite of Christian initiation, or through the Eucharist,⁸⁵⁷ but through active solidarity and transference. Human pain has forever been transformed and elevated to a rank of soteriological significance. For this reason suffering has an ecclesial dimension where those who suffer no longer suffer alone. For this reason we can say with confidence, along with St Paul, the most enigmatic and mysterious of all the sayings in the

⁸⁵⁴ Farwell, 123.

⁸⁵⁵ John Paul II, 24.

⁸⁵⁶ Romans 6:3-4.

⁸⁵⁷ 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

New Testament: “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church.”⁸⁵⁸ For this reason to gaze at the Cross is to unite one’s sufferings with those of Jesus in the full knowledge that not only does he understand but he offers a sympathetic hand of consolation, and ultimately transforms our suffering into joy.

So although redemption has been completely accomplished by Jesus’ death, Jesus remains forever open to human suffering and invites us like St Thomas not just to probe those wounds⁸⁵⁹ but add our own to his; for “it seems to be part of the very essence of Christ’s redemptive suffering that this suffering requires to be unceasingly completed.”⁸⁶⁰ And so like St Francis, who was the first to receive the stigmata⁸⁶¹ - or the wounds of Christ on his own body - all can testify to the physical intimacy and rich empathy between Jesus and his disciples. And for those in the Church the darkest secret of successful ministry, to be truly *Persona Christi* is the knowledge that it is only through one’s own wounds can one heal. “Since it is his task to make visible the first vestiges of liberation for others, he must bind his own wounds carefully in anticipation of the moment when he will be needed. He is called to be the wounded healer, the one who must look after his own wounds but at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others.”⁸⁶² For it is there, the place where wounds are confronted that there is a recognition that not only is one powerless to heal them, for it is a place synonymous with death,⁸⁶³ but strangely, it is there that the discreet

⁸⁵⁸ Colossians 1:24.

⁸⁵⁹ John 20: 25-27.

⁸⁶⁰ John Paul II, 24.

⁸⁶¹ St Francis received the stigmata on Mount Verna on the 13th September 1224, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. “Suddenly he saw a vision of a Seraph, a six-winged angel on a Cross. This angel gave him the gift of the five wounds of Christ.” (One on each hand and foot made from the nails and the other in his side made from the lance that pierced him.)

⁸⁶² Nouwen, 1994, 82.

⁸⁶³ Nouwen, Henri J. M. (1997), *The Inner Voice of Love*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 22.

presence of God's grace is most actively at work. For, "it is suffering more than anything else, which clears the way for the grace which transforms human souls. Suffering, more than anything else that makes present in the history of humanity the powers of the redemption."⁸⁶⁴ The wounds of Christ received on the Cross are thus no ordinary cuts, for they are marks which reveal God's Love,⁸⁶⁵ and although they bleed for a broken world, they are ultimately saving wounds that heal.

And what these wounds bind up and heal is the state of alienation brought on by sin. "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation."⁸⁶⁶ The purpose of the atonement, as the word lexically suggests, has always been the healing and repair of a broken and estranged relationship. The reason and necessity of the atonement is to restore, renew and strengthen friendship with God. This principle goes right back to the historic Day of Atonement, which was the supreme cosmic ratification and earthly maintenance of good covenantal relations. It goes without saying that this reconciliation is profoundly multi-layered operating firstly for the individual with God himself, then with each other, then with communities at large and ultimately with the whole of creation. Reconciliation always comes from God's initiative, who alone provides the means and method to achieve it.⁸⁶⁷ "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us a ministry of reconciliation, that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them,

⁸⁶⁴ John Paul II, 29.

⁸⁶⁵ "In several places Gregory of Nyssa will speak of this suffering as the 'wounding of love' (a double genitive)." Ward, Graham, *Suffering and Incarnation* cited in Gibbs, 173.

⁸⁶⁶ Romans 5:10-11.

⁸⁶⁷ Rahner (2006), 283.

and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”⁸⁶⁸ Discord eventually gives way to concord, hatred to harmony and the all pervading peace of the Kingdom of Heaven.⁸⁶⁹ The paramount ministry that Christ embraces on the Cross is one designed to achieve reconciliation and the restoration of friendship,⁸⁷⁰ where holiness is transferred to those incorporated into this new act of creation. For this reason it is to this telling metaphor (reconciliation) which captures what Jesus is about, and which subsumes so many others, that must be considered in the final analysis.

⁸⁶⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, see also Ephesians 2:16.

⁸⁶⁹ Luke 2:14, Romans 5:1. Ephesians 2:17.

⁸⁷⁰ John 15:15.

Chapter 7. Reconciliation

For the early Church the resurrection was the hermeneutical grid through which the first Christians experienced and tasted the freshness of salvation.⁸⁷¹ God's intervention in the death of Jesus reversed and restored the apparent failure of his mission and definitively elevated it to a new and cosmic dimension. Yet the Cross remained pivotal as a landmark of solidarity with the human condition, the dying gesture of the God-man stretched out on the Cross was one of universal embrace, where the love of God with infinite compassion reached out to the farthest corners of the universe. "The very form of the Cross, extending out into the four winds, always told the ancient Church that the Cross means solidarity: its outstretched arms would gladly embrace the universe. According to the Didache, the Cross *is semeion epektaseos*, a 'sign of expansion', and only God himself can have such a wide reach: 'On the Cross God stretched out his hands to encompass the bounds of the universe.'"⁸⁷²

Yet the Cross more than anything else, brought peace through an act of reconciliation. It is this metaphor above all others that seems so serviceable because it captures not only the sheer gratuity of God's intervention but also the harmony that it brings in its wake. The détente between God and humanity is effectively ended. A ceasefire has been declared between the state of alienation and separation that existed between God

⁸⁷¹ "It was possible for early Christians to sum up the gospel without mention of the atoning significance of the death of Christ, but with some reference to his resurrection or exaltation." von Balthasar, Hans Urs (1989), *The Glory of the Lord. A theological Aesthetics. VII The New Covenant*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 70.

⁸⁷² von Balthasar, 1979, 13.

and humanity. God has stepped onto the frontier and crossed it,⁸⁷³ crossed the no man's land that had become a yawning gulf between God and the human condition. Jesus effectively becomes the bridge over which humanity can cross back homeward towards God. "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his Cross."⁸⁷⁴ The theme of reconciliation is compelling because as well as being personable, it provides an organizing principle, or underlying concept, that unifies the other competing models that describe salvation. It is also comprehensive enough to capture the healing that exists as a result of God's intervention between the divine and human, and simultaneously between people with each other; whereas technical language such as *justify* can only really betray the forensic status of the human person vis-à-vis God⁸⁷⁵

The word reconciliation, therefore, has a graphic nuance that encapsulates the enmity that existed between God and humanity, but also the rapprochement that is now affected. Salvation *is* reconciliation because it ushers in the ethos and essence of the Kingdom of God that breaks in with the person of Jesus and his teaching. It is this Kingdom which becomes the defining feature of his mission because it is a kingdom of reconciliation of people with the creator and with one another. Jesus' preaching penetrates the most alienated sectors of the community.⁸⁷⁶ Those on the margins and traditionally those perceived to be furthest from the kindness of God, the poor, the

⁸⁷³ Barth, 22.

⁸⁷⁴ Colossians 1:20.

⁸⁷⁵ Marshall, Howard, I. (2007), *Aspects of the Atonement. Cross & Resurrection in the Reconciling of Humanity*, Paternoster Press, London, 131-132.

⁸⁷⁶ "Thus he extended reconciliation not only to those pious people who followed the many prescriptions of the law, but especially to those sinners who did not know or hardly knew the law." Schwager, Raymund, S.J. (1999), *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation. Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption*, The Crossroad Publishing Co., New York, 38.

sick, the lost and the broken. The invitation to this kingdom is in effect an amnesty, a moratorium that welcomes all, for even the tax collectors and prostitutes are eagerly entering it ahead of the pious.⁸⁷⁷ Yet it is God who takes the initiative to remove the obstacle or barrier between them in the first instance.⁸⁷⁸ Through the death, resurrection and ascent of Jesus, the gates of paradise that have been locked since the fall and dawn of humanity are reopened and fellowship is restored. “Reconciliation is the restitution, the resumption of a fellowship which once existed but was then threatened by dissolution. It is the maintaining, restoring and upholding of that fellowship in face of elements which disturbs and disrupts and breaks it. It is the realization of the original purpose which underlay and controlled it in defiance, and by the removal of this obstruction.”⁸⁷⁹

What is important to emphasize is that the initiative from first to last always comes from God. Salvation is a gift and a result of the movement of prevenient grace which restores friendship whilst the human person is still classified as a sinner. The term Reconciliation has embedded within it both the positive aspect of God’s action and the negative reality of humanity’s estrangement. “For in this explanation it is precisely a God who loves the sinner originally and without reasons who is the cause of his reconciliation. Hence God is reconciled as one reconciled by himself, and it is as reconciled in this way that he obviously wills on his own initiative one and the same grace which both establishes Christ and gives us the possibility of freely turning to God.”⁸⁸⁰ So God is both the active agent of reconciliation and the one to whom we

⁸⁷⁷ Matt. 21:32, see: Ormerod, Neil (2007), *Creation, Grace, and Redemption*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 92.

⁸⁷⁸ Brummer, Vincent (2005), *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity. Making Sense of Christian Doctrine*, Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, Hampshire, England, 53.

⁸⁷⁹ Barth, 22.

⁸⁸⁰ Rahner, Karl (2006), 283.

are reconciled. As St Paul States: “But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”⁸⁸¹ Salvation is, therefore, not something one can earn or coerce from God, for it lies always in the realm of gift. Moreover, it cannot be narrowed to individualistic needs either, for it has cosmic ramifications and reaches out to the perfection and consummation of all creation in the eschaton.⁸⁸² Reconciliation spills out to restore not just the relationship with God but the very brokenness of the world, reversing the fallout of human sin that destructively clipped creation in its primordial splendor.⁸⁸³ However, this does not necessarily imply a universal redemption, as taught by Origen in his infamous doctrine of *apokatastasis*,⁸⁸⁴ or for that matter the ultimate rehabilitation of the Devil, which St Anselm clearly refutes.⁸⁸⁵ Yet it is the God-man, Jesus, that singly occupies the historical space where conversion and healing is realized, the centre where the distinct lines of the history of salvation and the subjectivity of the Incarnation meet to affect reconciliation. For, “only the viewing of this history in its unity and completeness, the viewing of Jesus Christ Himself, in the two lines cross-in the sense that He Himself is the subject of what takes place on these two lines. To that extent the reconciliation of the world with God and the conversion of the world to God took place in Him. To that extent He Himself, His existence, is this reconciliation.”⁸⁸⁶

Clearly, there is a tension between how this reconciliation is affected and where the emphasis is placed, either on the Incarnation as a soteriological force, the ministry and

⁸⁸¹ Rom. 5:8.

⁸⁸² Schwobel, Christoph, cited in Gunton, Colin E. (2003), *The Theology of Reconciliation*, T&T Clark, London & New York, 24.

⁸⁸³ Genesis 3:17-19.

⁸⁸⁴ This doctrine of universal reconciliation (*apokatastasis*) was condemned together with other teachings of Origen by an edict of the Emperor Justinian in 543 and by the third Council of Constantinople in 553. See: Schwager, 1999, 4.

⁸⁸⁵ Anselm (2005), *Basic Writings*, Open Court Classics, Chicago, Book Second, Chap. XXI, 300.

⁸⁸⁶ Barth, 136.

teaching of Jesus as epitomized in the healing miracles, or the strategic and transactional significance of the Cross. It would be illegitimate to caricature Jesus' life merely as a prelude to his death, as some taster of the redemptive reality that he will secure on the Cross. Yet the crucifixion for Western Christians, in contrast to the Eastern Churches, has always seen the Cross as occupying the high ground of atonement theology. What exactly it reveals about the divine intentionality towards humanity, will dictate the way in which God is perceived and even influence our own dealings with each other. Indeed, St Augustine portrays the Cross as a didactic tool. He remarks: "That while the disciples had forgotten their teacher, the good thief saw the Cross as a classroom: 'That Cross was a classroom; that's where the teacher taught the thief; the tree he was hanging on became the chair he was teaching from.'"⁸⁸⁷ The lesson first and foremost has to be that Jesus' trajectory towards the Cross is not a suicide mission, but one that demonstrates a spirit of obedience in what it is to be human. The lesson we learn from Jesus' Crucifixion is not that the Father wanted Jesus dead but that he wanted him to experience the fullness of being human. Herbert McCabe puts a controversial top-spin on this and succinctly says that: "Jesus died of being human."⁸⁸⁸ It is simply regrettable that we have created a world where good people are often tortured and put to death. "The obedience of Jesus to his Father is to be totally, completely human. This is his obedience, an expression of his love for the Father; the fact that to be human means to be crucified is not something that the Father has directly planned but what we have arranged. We have made a world in which there is no way of being human that does not involve suffering."⁸⁸⁹ The Cross,

⁸⁸⁷ Augustine, Sermon 234.2, cited in Dryer, Elizabeth A. (editor) (2000), *The Cross in Christian Tradition, from Paul to Bonaventure*, Paulist Press, New York, 157.

⁸⁸⁸ McCabe, Herbert O.P. (1987), *God Matters. Contemporary Christian Insights*, Mowbray, London and New York, 97.

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid., 93.

therefore, is a sacrament which reveals the supreme humanity of Jesus at its most vulnerable whilst simultaneously unmasking the sin of the world.

This solidarity with the human condition results in Jesus taking on board our anthropological destiny. He experiences the full powerlessness of the human reality co-determined by guilt and sin.⁸⁹⁰ For, “in order to involve sinful humanity the reconciler must truly bear our fate of sin and godlessness. The form of God’s action in the Son is mediatorial substitution: bearing the sin of the world and imparting God’s righteousness to us.”⁸⁹¹ There is a perception of crude exchange where Jesus shares the responsibility of his fellow human beings and like them shares their fate.⁸⁹² Instead of washing his hands in innocence he dirties them so as to stand shoulder to shoulder with them in an ontological gesture of solidarity. “For our sake he (God the Father) made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him he might become the righteousness of God.”⁸⁹³ Obviously this degree of identification could suggest that he also becomes in need of redemption and reconciliation himself with the Father; a sort of prototype of all sinners.⁸⁹⁴ The patristic insights regarding salvation were thus keen to balance the humanity with his divinity. “Thus the patristic ideas on salvation entailed the divinity of Christ. But divinity is not enough. Their ideas on salvation also required them to claim the full humanity of Christ. Apart from the axiom that ‘only God can save’, their ideas on salvation entailed a second axiom that Gregory of Nazianzus formulated as follows: ‘What Christ has not assumed he has not

⁸⁹⁰ “But this human experience, which is really quite obvious, is prevented from becoming innocuous by the message of Christianity and its assertion that this co-determination of the situation of every person by the guilt of others is something universal, permanent, and therefore also original. There are no islands for the individual person whose nature does not already bear the stamp of the guilt of others, directly or indirectly, from close or from afar.” Rahner, 2006, 109, see also 106-115.

⁸⁹¹ Schwobel, Christoph, cited in Gunton, 2003, 34.

⁸⁹² Vass, George (1998), *A Pattern of Doctrine's 2. The Atonement and Mankind's Salvation. Understanding Karl Rahner. Vol. 4*, Sheed & Ward, London, 32-33.

⁸⁹³ 2 Cor. 5:21.

⁸⁹⁴ Vass, 31.

healed.”⁸⁹⁵ Jesus’ solidarity is such with the human condition that he participates in the horrors of human existential reality but with the aim of horror reversal, through a ministry of preaching, teaching and healing.⁸⁹⁶

Jesus conceivably shared the generic load of the first Adam, for part of the genetic make up of the human race, the DNA of Adam’s constitution, as it were, is guilt, and this is applied to him, although he himself is innocent and uncontaminated by original sin.⁸⁹⁷ “The case of Adam is of an ancestor incurring a debt to the Devil that then descended like a burdened estate, with ever accumulating interest, to his offspring. Christ by his death wiped out the interest, then transferred the debt to himself: as such he is ‘bonus creditor’.”⁸⁹⁸ Salvation, therefore, becomes a matter of being relieved of this corporate sense of guilt which Christ pays off on behalf of all humanity on the Cross.⁸⁹⁹ Inevitably there is a tendency towards interpreting the Cross as some sort of mercantile transaction or cosmic economy of exchange, where humanity’s sins are transferred to Christ, and in return his righteousness is imputed to us.⁹⁰⁰ God becomes simultaneously the broker and creditor. Jesus becomes the archetypal substitute for condemned humanity where the currency that is trafficked in is death.⁹⁰¹ Although other images such as healing and the restoration of God’s image were also present they became sidelined, and the idea that Christ rescues us from death (the wages of

⁸⁹⁵ Brummer, 81.

⁸⁹⁶ Adams, Marilyn McCord (2007), *Christ and Horrors. The Coherence of Christology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 202.

⁸⁹⁷ “I want to argue that God can take our guilt because he identifies so closely with us that our guilt can be shared, or transferred.” Holmes, Stephen, R. (2007), *The Wondrous Cross. Atonement & Penal Substitution in the Bible and History*, Paternoster Press, London, 97.

⁸⁹⁸ Bartlett, W. Anthony (2001), *Cross Purposes. The Violent Grammar of Christian Atonement*, Trinity Press International, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 71.

⁸⁹⁹ Brummer, 69.

⁹⁰⁰ Boersma, 167.

⁹⁰¹ “And reconcile sinners to God by his own death. Therefore have we clearly found that Christ, whom we confess to be both God and man, died for us.” St Anselm, 2005, Book Second, Chap. XV, 278.

sin)⁹⁰² became paramount but by way of exchange, with himself shedding his own blood.⁹⁰³

So for some, like St Athanasius, the price that had to be paid was simply *death*, for the penalty incurred was the loss of the divine gift of immortality.⁹⁰⁴ But later death itself became personified as in the notorious ransom theory, and the debt was paid quite crudely and simply to the Devil. “The devil held us as slaves; he produced the deed for us, using as paper our vulnerable body. The wicked forger stands there, shaking the bill at us and demanding payment....The human being could not save himself, for he was himself the debtor. No angel was enough to buy him free, for none had such a ransom. A sinless one had to die for sinners: this was the only solution left for our plight.”⁹⁰⁵ This mythological construct was famously rejected by Gregory of Nazianzus who dismissed the idea that God needed to pay the Devil anything, even for the purpose of defeating him, so the ransom price was transferred quite logically to God instead.⁹⁰⁶ This represented a significant but dangerous shift in the soteriological landscape, where it was now God who demanded payment. Even though the ransom theory of Irenaeus continued to be the dominant orthodox theory on the subject for nearly a thousand years, behind it lurked the ghost of violence and the unresolved tension between God’s justice and forgiveness.

Excavating the biblical data, the New Testament is studded with the sheer excess and bounty of God’s desire to reconcile unconditionally. There are no qualifiers or exchange rates set, only a spirit of contrition which accepts one’s own poverty in

⁹⁰² Romans 6:23.

⁹⁰³ Marshall, 3.

⁹⁰⁴ Viladesau, 27.

⁹⁰⁵ Proculus of Constantinople, *Sermon on Mary*, cited by Daley, Brian, In: Davies, Stephen, 160.

⁹⁰⁶ Viladesau, 27.

relation to the magnanimity of God. “In Jesus’ own dealings with sinners and in his teaching about forgiveness, compensation is never required as a prior condition for being received back into the love of God. This is true of the parables of forgiveness, the narratives of conversion or reconciliation of individuals or in the plain teaching of Christ. Satisfaction is never required as a condition of their being reconciled with God.”⁹⁰⁷ The parable of the prodigal son⁹⁰⁸ is the archetypal metaphor for the relentless and ever welcome embrace from the Father to his wayward children. The parable of the unforgiving servant⁹⁰⁹ demonstrates that the mechanism of God’s mercy and forgiveness does not rely on a payment of debt, rather it is free and gratuitous and an abiding example of how forgiveness should work: from the heart and abundantly. “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; release one another from debt, and your debt will also be forgiven, give and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”⁹¹⁰ Jesus consistently claimed that forgiveness came with no hidden strings attached *even if* one becomes a victim of murder; vengeance and the lust for payment shouldn’t become the overriding concern. “Where Abel’s blood cries from the ground for vengeance” (Gen 4:10), the author of Hebrews wrote that Jesus’ blood “speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (Heb. 12:24). Rather than crying for vengeance, Jesus’ blood speaks “a word of mercy and forgiveness”.⁹¹¹ Indeed it forms a cluster of some of the last words spoken by Jesus from the Cross: “Father, forgive

⁹⁰⁷ Winter, 66.

⁹⁰⁸ Luke 15:11-32.

⁹⁰⁹ Matt. 18:23-35.

⁹¹⁰ Luke 6:37-38.

⁹¹¹ Weaver, J. Denny (2005), *The Non Violent Atonement*. Wm B. Eerdmans publishing co, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K., 62-63.

them for they know not what they do”,⁹¹² indicating that the Cross reveals God as a suffering love for enemies.⁹¹³

Yet on closer analysis there is also a dark side to this amnesty that casts its shadow over those who fail to implement the new rule. Jesus speaks of God’s coming as one of goodness yet there are also harsh words of judgement which exposes a major theological fault line in the doctrine of redemption. Jesus, despite his universal message of reconciliation and love of enemies⁹¹⁴ shows an attitude of intolerance to those who do not receive it. So much so, W. Hirsch caustically comments: “No one is more intolerant toward his opponents than he. He wants to see not only his ‘enemies’, but each person who refuses to believe in all his eccentricities, punished by ‘eternal damnation’, and he wants to throw them into the water with a millstone around their necks.”⁹¹⁵ So much so, one can question whether in fact the eschatological mediator of salvation becomes in part, the historical mediator of damnation?⁹¹⁶ It also raises the question of what connection does Jesus’ death on the Cross have on the overall scales of justice, and the balance of probability for unconditional clemency? What is smuggled in with the concept of Jesus’ death being salvific, is the myth that violence is redemptive where behind the Cross some secret deal or metaphysical trade off is struck. For the Church Fathers it was the Devil who *illegitimately* insisted on payment as condition to release captive humanity; after Anselm⁹¹⁷ this role is definitively reversed, where the Devil and God effectively swap places. It is now God who

⁹¹² Luke 23:34.

⁹¹³ Adams, 101.

⁹¹⁴ Matt. 5:44.

⁹¹⁵ Hirsch, W., cited in: Schwager, 1999, 53.

⁹¹⁶ Schwager, 1999, 81.

⁹¹⁷ It was of course one of the Cappodican Fathers, Gregory of Nazianzen, who first questioned the notion of any transaction with the Devil. He volunteered that the ransom should be seen in an allegorical fashion, as paid by the Son to God “to whom he is seen in all things to yield”. This shift in thinking effectively paved the way for the idea that it was now God who required the death of the Christ and not the Devil. See: Bartlett, 67.

legitimately exacts a payment of debt. “Anselm, however, makes God the one who *insists* on debt. The debt humanity has incurred must be paid with human blood. The God who rejected sacrifice now demands it, for Christ’s voluntary offering of himself to death, which is at the heart of Anselm’s theory, was inevitably construed in sacrificial terms. From the start sacrifice and satisfaction run together. Law assumes a central function within theology.”⁹¹⁸ For this reason, it can be speculated that since Christianity became the dominant and official religion of the empire, the Roman system of law, which involved a retributive system of reward and punishment, supplanted the more biblically based system of covenantal law.⁹¹⁹ The covenantal system of grace and favour, healing and restoration was replaced with a more blunt and exacting instrument of retribution. God and law merge, and to all intents and purposes become synonymous, for what is divinized is the sheer power of the law rooted no longer in generosity but parsimony, revenge rather than free forgiveness, or what some have called “rationalized vengeance”.⁹²⁰ The root of the doctrine is thus thrust back deep into the chilly soil of alienation and God’s justice, rather than the fertile plains of the Promised Land and liberation. It also provided a template on how human to human relations should be conducted. “The penal consequences of this doctrine were grim indeed, as it entered the cultural bloodstream...In which earthly punishments were demanded because God himself had demanded the death of his son.”⁹²¹

⁹¹⁸ Gorringe, 102.

⁹¹⁹ See: Thiessen, Vic in: Barrow, Simon & Bartley, Jonathan (editors) (2005), *Consuming Passion. Why the killing of Jesus Really Matters*, Darton Longman & Todd, London, 38.

⁹²⁰ Davies, Brian and Leftow, Brian (2004), *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, Cambridge University Press, 282.

⁹²¹ Gorringe, 103.

St Anselm's satisfaction theory and the *Cur Deus Homo*?

Anselm's satisfaction theory thus has a lot to answer for, and will have to be analyzed in detail. St Anselm⁹²² was born at Aosta (Italy) and entered the monastery of Bec in Normandy⁹²³ succeeding Lanfranc as Abbot⁹²⁴ and finally becoming Archbishop of Canterbury in 1093. His book *Cur Deus Homo?* (*Why the God Man?*) was written for his monks but was an attempt to explain to his detractors the necessity and fittingness of the Incarnation. It also has an apologetic purpose for in his sights were the *Infidels*, the Jewish and Muslim world who felt that Christianity was contrary to reason and that the Incarnation, and in particular the crucifixion, dishonored God. Islamic interpretation of Jesus' death even as a prophet was so abhorrent that it concluded with the notion that someone else must have taken his place at the crucifixion.⁹²⁵ Anselm was also contradicting the view, current since the second century, that the Devil had any rights over humanity.⁹²⁶ He says: "Suppose, now, someone cites that *handwriting of the decree* which the Apostle says *was against* us and was blotted out by the death of Christ. Someone may think this means that the devil, as if under some sort of signed contract, justly exacted sin of man, before the passion of Christ, as a sort of interest on the first sin which he persuaded man to commit and as a penalty for

⁹²² AD 1033-1109.

⁹²³ AD 1060.

⁹²⁴ In AD 1078.

⁹²⁵ Probably Judas, the Koran (4.156-57) criticizes the Jews for "saying, 'we killed the messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah,' when they did not kill or crucify him; but he/it was counterfeited [or: a double was substituted] before their eyes.....And certainly they do not kill him." See Brown (1994), 1094 and also 1093 where the Gnostic notion of Jesus having a look-alike or twin is considered as being the victim of crucifixion instead of him.

⁹²⁶ "He denies that, by his sinning, man becomes the property of the Devil: even in his sin he remains God's. He does admit that in his sin and as a result of it, God allows the Devil to harass him. It is generally agreed that in a few swift strokes St. Anselm destroys a view of the control of the Devil over man in his sin which held from the second century until the twelfth." McIntyre, John (1954), *St Anselm and His Critics. A Re-interpretation of the Cur Deus Homo*, Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh, 70.

sin, so that thereby he would seem to prove his just rights over man. I cannot at all agree with this interpretation.”⁹²⁷

To understand the model of the atonement that was so cogently proposed by Anselm it is necessary to understand the cultural forces that shaped its emergence. Anselm made the notion of *satisfaction* a central feature of his soteriological system which was essentially about making reparation for the *honour* violated by sin. Feudalism was the societal backdrop of the time, but equally significant is the monastic world which was the base from which Anselm operated. The Benedictine rule⁹²⁸ strictly governed Anselm’s life in the monastery where *ordo* or rank within the monastery was of fundamental importance. The Abbot occupied a position of primacy as Lord and represented Christ to the rest of the community.⁹²⁹ Another tier of influence came from the confessional and the realm of penance,⁹³⁰ where the early Fathers of the Church (particularly Augustine and especially Tertullian) had used the term *satisfaction* specifically in the context of penance and penitential practice. Tertullian was the first to employ the word “satisfaction” which is of a purely Latin conception having no Greek equivalent. It was borrowed from the legal language of Rome. Tertullian was a lawyer and thus with a lawyer’s brief introduces a forensic term into atonement theology, with the ensuing atmosphere of the courtroom, which in some way anticipates the *Cur Deus Homo?* and prepares the ground for later medieval

⁹²⁷ Anselm of Canterbury (1969), *Why God Became Man and The Virgin Conception and Original Sin*. Magi Books, Inc. New York, Book 1. Chap.7, 73.

⁹²⁸ The Rule of St Benedict (480-550) was the determinative Rule for monks in western Christendom as opposed to the Rule of St Basil in the East.

⁹²⁹ “Let the abbot, since he is believed to hold the place of Christ be called Lord and Abbot, not for any pretensions of his own, but for the honour and love of Christ.” Benedict, Chap 63.

⁹³⁰ “The word Penance derives from the Latin *paenitentia*, meaning penitence or repentance. In Christian history it has variously designated an inner turning to God or a public returning to the Church, any of a series of ecclesiastical disciplines designed to facilitate such inward or outward reconversion, and the various works that had to be performed as part of such disciplines.” Richardson, 435.

thought patterns of the atonement.⁹³¹ Medieval penitentials cultivated the notion that one could pay someone else to satisfy one's own obligation to repair the damage done by one's sin,⁹³² particularly if the penance was deemed too onerous.⁹³³

The sacrament of reconciliation (also known as the sacrament of penance) still retains the requirement of issuing of a penance to show one's sincerity of repentance and desire to make amends.⁹³⁴ Indeed, the word *penance* still retains the flavour of punishment or penalty, despite absolution being a completely gratuitous act through the mercy of God; yet the element of satisfaction attached, whether of prayer, fasting or almsgiving is significant. Moreover, the perennial tension buried just under the surface in all discussions regarding reconciliation is also apparent here, between the priest perceived as healer *or* judge.⁹³⁵ Added to this sacramental theology of penance was the rediscovery of the Roman law in the schools of Pavia and Bologna which intensified the notion that an injured person could be compensated for other than by direct payment;⁹³⁶ and this was the case with comparative legal systems in other parts of Europe: "According to German law, vengeance did not require to be executed on

⁹³¹ Foley, 78-81.

⁹³² See Viladesau, 71.

⁹³³ In order to help the priests in the selection of what would be considered an appropriate penance, a codification of penitential practices was constructed, between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, which were known as the penitential books (*libri poenitentiales*). These were lists of every kind of sin, with the exact type of penance attached. See: McBrien, Richard, P. (1981), *Catholicism*, Winston Press, Minneapolis, 779.

⁹³⁴ "The confessor is to impose salutary and appropriate penances, in proportion to the kind and number of sins confessed, taking into account, however, the condition of the penitent. The penitent is bound personally to fulfil these penances." Canon Law Society (1983), *Codex Iuris Canonici (Code of Canon Law)*, Collins Liturgical Publications, London, Canon 981.

⁹³⁵ "St. Anselm appears to have laid his finger on a most important feature of any complete soteriology, for however much we emphasise the kindness of God we cannot escape the fact of God's judgment, a fact more real to us even than to those who knew only the Law. Secondly, any adequate doctrine of Atonement must come to terms with the justice of God and not simply treat it as if it were removed by God's love or mercy." McIntyre, 1954, 103-104.

⁹³⁶ "*satisfactio* referred to compensation to an injured person other than by direct payment. The use of this term for these commutations was obvious. It is against this background that we must understand Anselm's introduction of a new metaphor for understanding the work of Christ – satisfaction." Gorringer, 89.

the evil-doer himself....The Church looked on Christians as forming a 'clan' with the saints in heaven, and the performance of penance could to a certain extent, or entirely, be passed onto the latter...German law held that the payment of the fine could be divided."⁹³⁷ It may have been from this source that Anselm derived the idea that humanity's servitude required the intervention of a third party where sins could be commuted and thus paid off by a fellow kinsman, but one who had the power to accrue the merit to do so. To unpack some of these influences further will give sharper insight into how Anselm developed his theory which was fated to have such a formative impact on subsequent views of the Atonement.

Anselm breathed the crisp clean air of feudalism which meant a stratified society where everyone knew their place. This hierarchic composition involved a rigid division between classes with little room for social mobility. The Lord was at the pinnacle of this system and the serf or vassal at the bottom. The Laird had the duty of maintaining harmony and dispensing justice within the realm and in return the vassal owed allegiance and a debt of honour. There was almost a Platonic sense of perfection reflected in maintaining the balance and symmetry within the system. If anyone disrupted this order they had to repair the damage and also pay compensation, but the price exacted was invariably proportionate to one's social standing. "Thus, in the New Forest laws introduced into England by Anselm's Norman masters, the penalty for a freeman resisting a forest Verderer was loss of freedom, but for a villein the loss of his right hand. If a deer was hunted till it panted, there was a fine of 10 shillings: If he be not a free man, then he shall pay double. If he be a bound man, he shall lose his

⁹³⁷ Foley, 112.

skin. The penalty for a serf killing a deer was death.”⁹³⁸ Social status clearly determined the punishment meted out, for the same act was interpreted with differing degrees of severity depending on whether it was directed against a peasant, knight, nobleman or king.⁹³⁹

A comparative incident is narrated in Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, where a serf-boy threw a stone in play and hurt the paw of a General’s favourite hound. When he discovered the dog limping compensation was exacted but in a particularly cruel act of vengeance. The next day the general goes out hunting but the quarry is the little boy. “His house-serfs were all mustered to teach them a lesson, and in front of them all stood the child’s mother. The boy was brought out of the lock-up. It was a bleak, cold, misty autumn day, a perfect day for hunting. The General ordered the boy to be undressed. The little boy was stripped naked. He shivered, panic stricken and not daring to utter a sound. ‘Make him run!’ ordered the General.”⁹⁴⁰ The little boy is torn apart by the pack of Borzori hounds. Here, as in Anselm’s world class distinction is ruthlessly maintained and injustice, in the sense of offering anything like a social and ethical critique is overlooked; what is supported is the political status quo of the reigning elite. To some extent the very notions of satisfaction and expiation were deeply bound up with revenge in medieval culture. The loss of any honour must be repaired; for it as a fundamental breach in the system, but it is not enough simply to *restore* honour, what was required was an additional levy of *satisfaction* which took account of the person’s standing who was dishonoured. If one looks closely at the rule of St Benedict, a document written in the 6th century, one can see a similar dynamic at

⁹³⁸ Stenton, D.M., Cited in Gorringer, 88.

⁹³⁹ See: Gorringer, 93.

⁹⁴⁰ Dostoevsky, Book Five, Part 5, *Rebellion*, 284.

work. It was a system which reinforced and deepened Anselm's mindset and world view.

Those who refer to Anselm's satisfaction argument as expounded in his book *Cur Deus Homo?* have often overlooked just how influential the Rule of St Benedict was on shaping key features of the argument. Davies and Leftow⁹⁴¹ hint at the influence that scripture would have had on him as a monk in his daily diet of *lectio divina*, and Hogg⁹⁴² mentions that the coenobitic life would give coherence and balance as well as providing a rich biblical and liturgical context. Yet *none* have identified the Rule of St Benedict *itself* as having such an architectonic influence in shaping the thought world of St Anselm and in particular the *Cur Deus Homo?* The structure of a Benedictine community is unashamedly hierarchic, where anything ordered by the superior is to be received as if it was a divine command. "For the obedience which is given to superiors is given to God, since he himself said: *He who listens to you listens to me.*"⁹⁴³ And if there is any dissent or murmuring even in the heart, "he will incur the punishment due to murmurers, unless he amend and make reparation".⁹⁴⁴ Chapter 7 on humility is particularly instructive as it reinforces the requirement to capitulate to the superior in all things and at all levels of the human psyche and will. "And if any brother, for however trifling a reason, be corrected in any way by the Abbot, or any of his seniors, or if he perceive that any senior, in however small a degree, is displeased or angry with him, let him at once without delay cast himself on the ground at his feet, and lie there making reparation, until that displeasure is appeased with a blessing. But

⁹⁴¹ Davies, Brian, 286.

⁹⁴² Hogg, David S. (2004), *Anselm of Canterbury, The Beauty of Theology*, Ashgate, Burlington, VT, 24-25.

⁹⁴³ Benedict, Chap. 5.

⁹⁴⁴ Ibid.

if anyone should disdain to do this, let him either undergo corporal punishment, or, if he be stubborn, let him be expelled from the monastery.”⁹⁴⁵

Clearly, the balance of power in the Rule of St Benedict is from the top trickling downwards; for if the honour of a superior is compromised in any way recompense and satisfaction is demanded, and this is to be backed up with threats of punishment and excommunication. In the hands of an unscrupulous Abbot, the rule of St Benedict is a dangerous weapon of autocratic design. Terrance Kardong, a leading commentator on the rule of St Benedict warns of such danger. “In a hierarchical and religious society such as a Benedictine monastery the potential abuse of authority is great. Not only is there an emphasis on the need for the lower orders to honour the higher but such deference is demanded in the name of God. The superior is seen as carrying out a special divine function. Thus obedience and respect verging on divine worship are demanded, one could hardly devise a more potent strategy for engaging the deepest and religious cooperation of the human person.”⁹⁴⁶ However, the Benedictine model of religious life gave Anselm a structure that mirrored perfectly the supremacy of God as Monarch and Lord. “To challenge the honour of the Christian God, the supreme Lord, was to threaten the capstone and cement of the universe. To do so by means of the doctrine of Christianity itself was to set fire in the family hall.”⁹⁴⁷ Christ in this system easily became the perfect knight whose noble death was to restore his Father’s honour through a spectacular gesture of obedience and sacrifice, for only a God-Man could make the necessary amends and satisfaction

⁹⁴⁵ Benedict, Chap.71.

⁹⁴⁶ Kardogn, Terrance (1992), *Respect for Persons in the Holy Rule. Benedict’s Contribution to Human Rights*, Cistercian Studies Vol. 27.3.

⁹⁴⁷ Bartlett, 80.

required.⁹⁴⁸ The recurring theme of sacrifice⁹⁴⁹ emerges from the fog of chivalry, where Christ gives himself up to death for God's honour. Where since he does not deserve to die, it is a *gift* not demanded.⁹⁵⁰ It is this stately sacrificial surrender of an ideal son that makes sufficient the reconciliation between God and humanity. "The redemptive meaning of the Incarnation, upon the perfect offering of an obedient life, upon a death whose loving acquiescence and completeness of sacrificial surrender absolutely satisfied a Father's desire for an ideal Son, and it makes these the all sufficient source and explanation of our reconciliation with God."⁹⁵¹

The *Cur Deus Homo* works by a series of question and answers from Boso to his master Anselm, where the interlocutory syllogism results in an exposition of the purpose of the Incarnation. St Anselm's argument rests on four foundational pillars which underpin the argument, notably: (1) The voluntary nature of the death of Christ; (2) The supreme value of his death; (3) The application of the merits of his death; and (4) his death as an example to humanity.⁹⁵² From the outset the emphasis is on the *death* of Christ, where his life and ministry are relegated to a prelude to the redemptive exchange that takes place on the altar of the Cross.⁹⁵³ What is contemplated is a theory that operates at a dazzling legal and historical abstraction stripped of the data of Gospel relevance. As Hogg says: "*The Cur Deus Homo?* has a lack of attention to the life of Jesus. There is a great deal of emphasis placed on the

⁹⁴⁸ "From Anselm onwards satisfaction and sacrifice were read together, and sacrifice was understood as propitiation." Gorringer, 29.

⁹⁴⁹ "How could the Father be satisfied with the death of Christ, unless He saw in the sacrifice mirrored His own love? – for God can be satisfied only with that which is as perfect as Himself. Agony doesn't satisfy God; agony only satisfied Moloch. Nothing satisfies God but the voluntary sacrifice of love." Foley, 160.

⁹⁵⁰ Whately, Arnold R., in Grensted, L.W. (1929), *The Atonement in History and in Life*, Lightning Source U.K., 205.

⁹⁵¹ Foley, 142.

⁹⁵² McIntyre, 1954, 154.

⁹⁵³ "He sees the death of Christ as the basis of all the forgiveness which God has offered to men in history - not only after Christ but also before him." Ibid., 176.

death of Jesus and how that death affects life, but nowhere does Anselm offer us a sustained treatment of how the life of Christ contributed to the suitability of his death.”⁹⁵⁴ However, Boso’s opening remarks in Chapter 5 gives a synopsis of the grand sweep of redemption which is delivered through the sweat, blood and tears of the God-Man; Here the Devil (who knows no justice)⁹⁵⁵ is defeated, God’s wrath is dissuaded and the kingdom of heaven is secured.⁹⁵⁶ It immediately becomes clear that salvation is a transaction removed from the mundane affairs of humanity and instead played out in an ideal metaphysical realm above their heads. Although it is God who desires the death of his Son,⁹⁵⁷ there is a symmetry of wills between them, where Jesus freely enters death for the salvation of humanity in a rugged spirit of obedience. There is, however, no real attempt to conceal, through clever window dressing, the violence that lurks behind the throne of God.

However, much space is devoted in the argument to prove that Christ dies willingly and without compulsion. It is strictly in accordance with obedience and the demands of justice that Christ offers his life as a satisfaction and not because of any coercion from the Father.⁹⁵⁸ The crux of the redemptive process hinges on the fact that Jesus suffered because of his own freewill, he was not commanded to do so, but he obeyed in order to save human kind.⁹⁵⁹ “*Anselm*: ‘God the Father did not treat that man in the way you seem to think, nor did He hand over the innocent to death in place of the guilty. For God did not compel Him to die, or allow Him to be slain, against His will;

⁹⁵⁴ Hogg, 180.

⁹⁵⁵ “The devil, though, had deserved no right to inflict the punishment; on the contrary, his action was all the more unjust in that he was not motivated by love of justice, but was driven by an impulse of malice.” Anselm, 1969, Book 1. Chap.7, 72.

⁹⁵⁶ Although, “nowhere does God appear in the *Cur Deus Homo?* as a God of Wrath.” McIntyre, 1954, 180.

⁹⁵⁷ “The Father desired the death of the Son, because he was not willing that the world should be saved in any other way.” Anselm, 1969, Book 1. Chap. 9, 80.

⁹⁵⁸ See Hogg, 34.

⁹⁵⁹ Foley, 123 & McIntyre, 1954, 155.

rather, He Himself, by his own free choice, underwent death, to save men.”⁹⁶⁰ Yet the argument breaks down at a key point because although the Father does not compel his Son, it is still transparently His *desire* that He should embrace death. “*Anselm*: ‘He did, it is true, speak of the will of the Father,’ not however, because the Father preferred His Son’s death to His life, but because the Father was unwilling that the human race be restored unless man performed some deed as outstanding as that death was to be. Since reason did not require something another could not do, the Son says the Father wills His death, and He would rather endure His own death than the loss of the human race. It is as if He said: ‘Because You do not will the world to be reconciled in any other way, I declare that in this way You are willing my death. May this will of yours, then, be done that is, let my death occur, that the world may be reconciled to you.’”⁹⁶¹ Consequently, the Son is left with very little room to manoeuvre and although there is no compulsion the dice are loaded in favour of Jesus choosing the will of the Father, which is to accept death for the salvation of humanity and drink from the chalice which the Father gives him.⁹⁶² “The Father then may be said to will the Death of the Son, because He virtually leaves the Son no alternative but death, if man is to be saved. The Son, by reason of the uprightness of His will, makes that will of the Father His own, or, perhaps more accurately, the Father wills what the Son wills, once the Son wills what is acceptable to the Father.”⁹⁶³

Jesus’ death is a lesson designed to teach that there is no salvation by any other means.⁹⁶⁴ Boso volunteers the obvious objection to such a gratuitously unjust act: “For it is a strange thing if God so delights in, or requires, the blood of the innocent,

⁹⁶⁰ Anselm, 1969, Book 1. Chap.8, 75.

⁹⁶¹ Ibid., Book 1. Chap.9, 79-80.

⁹⁶² Ibid., 80.

⁹⁶³ McIntyre, 1954, 157.

⁹⁶⁴ Anselm, 1969, Book 1. Chap.10, 82.

that he neither chooses, nor is able, to spare the guilty without the sacrifice of the innocent.”⁹⁶⁵ He then spells out the severity of the situation (which according to the structure similar to that of the Benedictine model and the feudal society outside the monastic enclosure) is fundamentally blighted by sin. God reigns as supreme Lord who now requires a debt of honour to be paid. Due to the gravity of sin, any restoration of honour will also require compensation in acknowledgement of the anguish incurred and in deference to the dignity of the person offended. “So then, every one who sins ought to pay back the honour of which he has robbed God; and this is the satisfaction which every sinner owes to God.”⁹⁶⁶ It is incompatible with justice that God will simply forgive without compensation or punishment.⁹⁶⁷ Compassion alone is insufficient, for the rule of law which is identical with God’s justice, ensures that God’s honour is protected and the distinction between innocence and guilt is preserved. Indeed, to pass over sin would be a breach of order, where there would be no significant difference between the innocent and the guilty.⁹⁶⁸ The unrighteous would be perceived as being freer than the unrighteous and what is more, even rival (or seen to be equal to) God, which would be an incongruous contradiction.⁹⁶⁹ This ensures that distinctions are maintained and that the Kingdom of God does not slide into chaos or anarchy, whilst simultaneously God’s freedom, justice and love are not seen to be compromised.⁹⁷⁰ What is important to note is the punitive language of punishment that is required to cancel out sin.⁹⁷¹

⁹⁶⁵ Ibid., 82-83.

⁹⁶⁶ Ibid., Book 1. Chap. 11. 84.

⁹⁶⁷ “St Anselm concludes that since it is impossible for God to exercise His liberty, His will, His kindness except within the limits of what is just and right, He cannot forgive the sinner without punishing him.” McIntyre, 1954, 99.

⁹⁶⁸ Anselm, 1969, Book 1. Chap. 12, 86.

⁹⁶⁹ Whately, Arnold R., in Grensted, 202.

⁹⁷⁰ “St. Anselm has shown that there are three attributes of God which must in no way be compromised - God’s freedom, His justice and His love. His freedom is compromised if God is solely determined in His Will to save the world by some inner necessity of His own Being, or by the sinful condition of

Law becomes the supreme principle that shores up the edifice of the divine, although Anselm admits that God's honour is intrinsic to his being and can never be subject to injury or change. What is revealed is a vindictive spirit that lurks at the throne of God, a spirit of vengeance and a desire for retributive justice, although naturally Anselm does not refer to it in this way. If God is offended, as supreme governor of the universe, he is entitled to a pay back and will exact this if it is not forfeited. If humanity does not freely pay their debt it will be taken from them *and* they will have to suffer torments as punishment in order to put them back in their rightful place. "It is impossible for God to lose his honour, for either the sinner pays his debt of his own accord, or, if he refuse, God takes it from him. For either man renders due submission to God of his own will, by avoiding sin or making payment, or else God subjects him to himself by torments,⁹⁷² even against man's will, and thus shows that he is the Lord of man, though man refuses to acknowledge it of his own accord."⁹⁷³ In Anselm's world, the Lord, whether Abbot or Laird, maintains justice as a kind of benevolent dictator, God's proxy, whose job it is not only to dispense justice but also maintain the good order and harmony of the realm. The aesthetic argument is strong and it is not just a Platonic reflection of the celestial court on earth but an admission that sin despoils and disrupts the very fabric and concord of the cosmos.⁹⁷⁴ The very schema of the restoration of humanity and the cosmos is fitting in the symmetry that is

man; His justice is compromised if He allows sin to go scot-free; and His love if He has no regard for the final blessedness of those whom He once created." McIntyre, 1954, 201.

⁹⁷¹ "To remit sin in this manner is nothing else than not to punish; and since it is not right to cancel sin without compensation or punishment; if it be not punished, then it is passed by undischarged." Anselm, 1969, Book 1. Chap. 12, 85.

⁹⁷² This could mean that God either inflicts torture (horrors) upon humanity, *or* leaves them alone to their own self-destructive tendencies, the endemic wages of sin.

⁹⁷³ Anselm, 1969, Book 1. Chap 14, 89.

⁹⁷⁴ "But when it does not will what it should, it dishonours God so far as it can, since it does not subject itself freely to His plan, and, to the extent of its power, it disturbs the order and the beauty of the universe, although it does not injure or degrade the power and dignity of God, at all." Anselm, 1969, Book 1 Chap. 15, 90.

employed: The obedience of Christ to undo the disobedience of Adam; the virgin Mary to restore the damage done by the first woman Eve; and wood of the Cross reversing the eviction from paradise, caused by the rapacious looting of fruit from the tree of knowledge.⁹⁷⁵ Indeed, this soteriological sketch itself has a precursor in the work of Irenaeus's recapitulation model of the Atonement. Even the number of the fallen angels is scrupulously made up from the elect of humanity to ensure a fulfilment of God's plan, to restore it to its ripeness of being. "Anselm: 'It is certain that God intended to make up the number of angels who had fallen, out of human nature, which he made sinless.'"⁹⁷⁶ Although in this concept he may have been influenced by St Augustine who mentions this theme first in his *Enchiridion* and *The City of God*,⁹⁷⁷ and we know that Anselm was heavily influenced by St Augustine.⁹⁷⁸ Anselm is also adamant that it is necessary for God to bring to perfection what he begun concerning human nature,⁹⁷⁹ for he cannot allow sin to violate the beauty of the universe or his will to be thwarted.

The heart of the argument rests on the anthropological legacy of a corrupted and wounded nature, where humanity's true appellation is being one of a sinner, and as a

⁹⁷⁵ "It was fitting, surely, that just as death had entered into the human race because of the disobedience of man, so by the obedience of man, life should be restored. Further, just as the sin that was the cause of our condemnation had its origin in a woman, it was equally fitting that the author of our justification and salvation should be born of a woman. It was also fitting that the devil, who conquered man by tempting him to taste of the fruit of a tree, should be conquered by a man through suffering he endured on the wood of a tree. There are also many other things which, carefully considered, show a certain indescribable beauty in this manner of accomplishing our redemption." Anselm, 1969, Book 1 Chap. 3, 68.

⁹⁷⁶ Anselm, 1969, Book 1 Chap. 16, 92.

⁹⁷⁷ "Mankind, who constituted the remainder of the intelligent creation, having perished without exception under sin, both original and actual, and the consequent punishments, should be in part restored, and should fill up the gap which the rebellion and fall of the devils had left in the company of the angels." St Augustine, *Enchiridion*. Chap. 29, 35-36. See also *City of God*. Chap. 22, 1023.

⁹⁷⁸ Hogg, 80.

⁹⁷⁹ Anselm, 1969, Book 2. Chap. 4, 122.

result cannot shirk the debt owed directly to God.⁹⁸⁰ For Anselm dishonouring is sinning and although Anselm does not distinguish evil from sin,⁹⁸¹ the definition of sin in the *Cur Deus Homo?* is simply this: “not to render to God his due”, and that is essentially to withhold the submission of the will to God.⁹⁸² Moreover, to defraud God of the honour which belongs to him, results in a *debt* to God.⁹⁸³ Indeed, *any* defiance of the will of God is interpreted as sinful, even if a glance that God forbids should result in the salvation of the entire universe.⁹⁸⁴ For any offence against an infinite God is an infinite offence.⁹⁸⁵ As Boso succinctly lays out the catch-22 formulae of humanity’s constitutional plight: “Man as a sinner owes God for his sin what he is unable to pay, and cannot be saved without paying.”⁹⁸⁶ However, more positively, it underscores the fact that only God can save, and only divine intervention is capable of making restitution. Yet although only God can repair the damage and make the necessary satisfaction it is only fitting that humanity ought to. Hence the need for the God-Man. “For God will not do it, because he has no debt to pay; and man will not do it, because he cannot. Therefore, in order that the God-man may perform this, it is necessary that the same being should be perfect God and perfect man, in order to make this atonement. For he cannot and ought not to do it, unless he be very God and very man.”⁹⁸⁷

⁹⁸⁰ “For St Anselm sin is an intensely personal thing: it is the failure of the creature to make that response of will, intelligence and affection which he ought, by reason of his very creatureliness, to make to his creator.” McIntyre, 1954, 72.

⁹⁸¹ Gasper, G.E.M. and Kolenberger (editors), (2006), *Anselm and Abelard. Investigations and Juxtapositions*. Papers in Medieval Studies 19, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto, 177.

⁹⁸² Anselm, 1969, Book 1 Chap.11, 84.

⁹⁸³ Foley, 125.

⁹⁸⁴ Anselm, 1969, Book 1 Chap. 21, 108.

⁹⁸⁵ McIntyre, 1954, 9.

⁹⁸⁶ Anselm, 1969, Book 1. Chap. 25, 117-118.

⁹⁸⁷ Anselm 2005, Book Second, Chap. VII, 260.

Jesus, therefore, stands in solidarity with us, being of our own race, and for this reason sufficiently qualified to represent us, yet he is free from the stigma of sin and immune from the limitations of the human condition. Sin has the quality of infinite affront to an infinite being and thus only a divine being can make the satisfaction required, for only a God-Man can stretch over the gulf that separates them to heal the division and debt of sin.⁹⁸⁸ So, salvation is simultaneously a descent from God and a reciprocal ascent from humanity in the person of Jesus. The efficacy of Christ's intervention through the Incarnation is such, that St Anselm emphasizes that Christ offers God something which he does not owe to God as a debt. "Anselm: Let us see whether this way consists of giving His life, or laying down His life, or delivering Himself up to death for the honour of God. God will not require this of Him as an obligation, for, as we have said, He will not be obliged to die, because there will be no sin in Him."⁹⁸⁹ Jesus is sinless and therefore does not deserve to die, for only sinners are under the penalty of death and are *obliged* to die, thus he dies *freely* and thus makes sufficient satisfaction. "The Deus-homo cannot offer up anything of His life to God as an adequate satisfaction; the alternative is that He offers His Death, which is possible satisfaction, since being sinless He is not required to die."⁹⁹⁰ Boso sums up the argument for the need of a redeemer with both divine and human credentials which is the reality of the Incarnation. "This debt was so great that, while none but man must solve the debt, none but God was able to do it; so that he who does it must be both God and man. And hence arises a necessity that God should take man into

⁹⁸⁸ "In II.11, II.18, the general contention is that the Death of Christ does not have only a God-ward reference, nor is its significance exhausted in the fact that Christ offers it up as a gift to God by way of private transaction. His Death is a public event, with, as it were, a horizontal reference. It provides an example of the price that is to be paid by those who earnestly seek to obey God's Will." McIntyre, 1954, 185.

⁹⁸⁹ Anselm, 1969, Book 2. Chap.11, 136.

⁹⁹⁰ McIntyre, 1954, 171.

unity with his own person.”⁹⁹¹ Unfortunately, the stark reality of this system is that the death of Christ becomes the central if not exclusive moment of salvation and the means of reconciliation.⁹⁹² The resurrection is eclipsed and the reason for the Incarnation is focused directly to the moment that Jesus can willingly climb the scaffolding of the Cross and go like a ritual lamb to the slaughter. Yet this sacrificial act from a divine-human being is so meritorious⁹⁹³ that from the store chest of God’s grace the surplus and superabundance of what he has achieved can be liberally transferred to his brothers and sisters, who are the beneficiaries of this transaction between the Father and Son, yet remain passive spectators. Still, the reward accrued from his death is richly and lavishly bestowed on humankind, their debt is remitted and they inherit not just the family silver, but the very keys to the kingdom of heaven.⁹⁹⁴

Here the concept of merit is brought to bear where Christ transfers the reward to his brethren for whom he represents.⁹⁹⁵ Christ’s death was voluntary and because of his sinlessness *unnecessary* and therefore surplus and thus of supreme value. His merits are infinite and, therefore, superabundant and available for humanity’s rescue.⁹⁹⁶

There is the concept of supererogation (doing more than is required) where in his

⁹⁹¹ Anselm, 1969, Book 2. Chap.18, 155. *(This and succeeding chapters are numbered differently in the different editions of Anselm’s texts on the *Cur Deus Homo?*)

⁹⁹² “The Son says that he desires his own death. For he preferred to suffer, rather than that the human race should be lost; as if he were to say to the Father: ‘Since thou dost not desire the reconciliation of the world to take place in any other way, in this respect, I see that thou desirest my death; let thy will, therefore, be done, that is, let my death take place, so that the world may be reconciled to thee.’” Anselm, 1969, Book 1. Chap. 9, 82.

⁹⁹³ “Now it is clearly stated that the value of the Death of Christ derives from the value of His person. *Only the Deus-homo* could achieve this excess of merit.” McIntyre, 1954, 183.

⁹⁹⁴ “Upon whom would he more properly bestow the reward accruing from his death, than upon those for whose salvation, as right reason teaches, he became man; and for whose sake, as we have already said, he left an example of suffering death to preserve in holiness? For surely in vain will men imitate him, if they be not also partakers of his reward.” Anselm, 1969, Book 2 Chap. 19, 160.

⁹⁹⁵ “The solution is that He will bestow the award on another. And on whom should He bestow it but on those for whose salvation He became man, and to whom He left the supreme example of His death?” Whately, Arnold R., in Grensted, 206.

⁹⁹⁶ Foley, 130, 150.

dying Jesus does something extra which God the Father does not require and his own nature necessitate. Here merit and satisfaction become intimately connected.⁹⁹⁷ God makes over the reward to those for whose salvation the Son became Incarnate. “The situation is not that Christ offers His Death to God on behalf of, or in the stead of, man for his sin, but rather that Christ offers His Death to God as a gift which He is not required to give, where upon God makes over to Christ’s brethren the reward due to Christ.”⁹⁹⁸ Christ, thereby establishes merit which is then transferred to sinners, but this excess is derived exclusively from the value of his divine person (in alliance with his sinlessness) and the sheer gratuity of his offering. “*Anselm*: Since not all men who were to be saved could have been present when Christ effected that redemption, so great was the efficacy in His death that its effect reaches even to those who live in other places and times. That it must be of benefit not only to those who were present, moreover, is easily known from the fact that not so many could be present at his death as are required to build up the heavenly city, even if all who lived all over the world at the time of His death were allowed to share in that redemption.”⁹⁹⁹

However, although McIntyre wants to say that St Anselm does not isolate the life from the death of Christ (as it is consistent with a single pattern of Divine action and self-offering)¹⁰⁰⁰ yet the accent falls with a certain inevitability and morbid fascination on the death of the God-Man. A death which is both simultaneously an example of dying for the sake of justice, and a mechanism to establish a reservoir of merit that can be accessed by his kinsman. “*Anselm*: To whom will it be more appropriate for Him to transfer the fruit and recompense of His death than to those for

⁹⁹⁷ McIntyre, 1954, 171-172.

⁹⁹⁸ Ibid., 181.

⁹⁹⁹ Anselm, 1969, Book 2. Chap. 16, 145.

¹⁰⁰⁰ McIntyre, 1954, 191.

whose salvation, as we have learned from reliable arguments He made Himself man and to whom, as we said, He gave by His death an example of dying for the sake of justice. It is useless, surely, for them to imitate Him if they will not share in His merit.”¹⁰⁰¹ It is the centrality of his death, regardless of how it is interpreted, that becomes the defining moment of any soteriological equation; for “this God-Man need not have preached and founded a kingdom, no disciples needed to have been gathered; He only required to die.”¹⁰⁰² Yet because Christ pays for sinners a debt he did not owe, and gives us a far greater example in so doing, his life delivered up in death is truly worthy of salvation. “*Anselm*: For He, without having any need to do it for Himself, or without being compelled to do it for others to whom He owed nothing but punishment, has given up a life so precious, yes, His very self, that is to say, so exalted a person, with such tremendous willingness.”¹⁰⁰³ Anselm interestingly omits to say how the benefits of Christ’s satisfaction are appropriated by individual believers, but presumably it is taken for granted that the sacramental system of the Church will be the ordinary dispenser of Christ’s grace.

The primary problem with the Anselmian model of the atonement, apart from its specific cultural and historical setting, is that the target of Jesus’ death appears to be to satisfy God’s honour;¹⁰⁰⁴ where sin is perceived as high treason and not as moral corruption.¹⁰⁰⁵ Foley argues that Anselm has missed the point of salvation because sin is portrayed as something unreal and irrelevant to the actual needs of humanity: “He

¹⁰⁰¹ St Anselm, 1969, Book 2 Chap.19, 160.

¹⁰⁰² Foley, 144.

¹⁰⁰³ Anselm, 1969, Book 2. Chap.18, 156.

¹⁰⁰⁴ “St. Anselm does not labour the sin-death relationship - a fact which some, as we shall see, regard as the gravest defect of this theory - for he is more concerned with the effects of sin upon God than upon man, and, consequently, the dishonour done to God is for him the dominating feature of the sin-situation.” McIntyre, 1954, 69.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Foley, 156.

(Anselm) has no understanding of a real salvation because he has no real understanding of sin. It is represented as something momentous in its effects upon both God and man, but its true ethical character is never discussed.”¹⁰⁰⁶ Anselm lays the foundations which are later used to bury some grisly corpses where Christ’s death is interpreted more as a propitiation (appeasement) of God’s wrath, or more crudely still a *punishment*, rather than as an expiation or forgiveness of sin. In later developments of the argument which evolve into full blown penal substitution versions of Anselm’s original, it is God’s Justice or Law that is the target for Jesus’ death. There always lurks here the ghost of vengeance where the myth or mystique of redemptive violence is used as the means to secure salvation, the substitutional death of an innocent for the liberation of the many. By deleting the Devil from the equation, Anselm shifted the target of the death of Jesus away from the Devil and directly toward God.¹⁰⁰⁷ God becomes the one who requires Jesus’ death as a method of payment, not to release captive humanity (as with the ransom theory) but to satisfy his offended honour. And what is more, “we are rescued from the Father, which is a far more mischievous thought than our rescue from the devil by ransom.”¹⁰⁰⁸ What is exposed is a violent subplot behind the rhetoric of salvation.

Penal substitution

It is God who to all intents and purposes orchestrates Jesus’ death so as to balance a noble levy of honour with satisfaction. Perversely, Jesus’ assassins become the agents of the divine will. “In this case, Jesus ceased being the revealer of God, and his

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ibid., 155.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Weaver, J. Denny, in Sanders, John (editor) (2006), *Atonement & Violence. A Theological Conversation*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 4.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Foley, 178.

opponents were entrusted with the divine mission of killing him as punishment on humankind, which stands in direct contradiction to the claim that in his mission Jesus' human will cooperated in complete obedience with the divine will that sent him."¹⁰⁰⁹ Once God switches place with the Devil in requiring the death of Jesus where there opens up an opposition between the Justice of the Father and the love and mercy of the Son, where God requires his death to satisfy some metaphysical transaction. With Anselm it is only satisfaction but "from Anselm onward penal substitution simply leaps the formal steps of satisfaction, moving at once to the point of wrath that lies behind the whole, and making Christ bear this passively rather than offer compensation actively."¹⁰¹⁰ Penal substitution is the most religiously pornographic of all models of the atonement (and relatively recent despite claims to the contrary by evangelical Christians); one should always be on one's guard against the fundamentalist spin that the mechanics of atonement can be laid bare once and for all by any one model, particularly one that is so hardcore in its adherence to the image of God-sanctioned and God-directed violence.

Anselm's satisfaction theory reigned supreme but eventually was displaced by versions associated with the reformers, and especially in some quarters with Calvinism,¹⁰¹¹ which were more explicitly penal in character. These lent themselves very easily to promoting structures of oppression in society along class lines, because the violence of God was easily transferred to the civic realm¹⁰¹² and criminal law.¹⁰¹³

¹⁰⁰⁹ Weaver, 56.

¹⁰¹⁰ Bartlett, 85.

¹⁰¹¹ "There is little doubt that for Calvin the death remains the main focus, but with its gruesome character stressed in a way that would have been quite foreign to Anselm. For Anselm it was enough that Christ had given up what he did not owe (his life), whereas for Calvin the satisfaction borne is the punishment that might otherwise have been imposed on us." Davies, Brian, 296.

¹⁰¹² Boersama, Hans, in Sanders, 61.

¹⁰¹³ Gorringe, 140.

Capital punishment, for example, was seen to be a logical and divinely endorsed method of administering justice.¹⁰¹⁴ With the satisfaction motif, and its later penal variants, there was an easy accommodation with violence because there was nothing ethically inherent in the model for resisting it. In fact to the contrary, punishment or the threat of punishment was a characteristic feature of its genus. It happily nurtured the idea that to seek compensation in the form of retribution for ills received was tantamount to a divine mandate, where one could flaunt a kind of pseudo-moral superiority over others who had violated the law. “In place of literal compensation for an injury a recompense is made in the form of a kind of pleasure, the right to torture. In ‘punishing’ the debtor, the creditor participates in a *right of the masters*: at last he, too, may experience for once the exalted sensation of being allowed to despise and mistreat someone as ‘beneath him’ ... the compensation ... consists in a warrant for and title to cruelty.”¹⁰¹⁵ In penal substitution Jesus is punished in place of killing us, thus God receives the necessary price that is required by our debt of sin to satisfy his law. Although this was quite foreign to Anselm’s original satisfaction theory he had inadvertently laid the groundwork.¹⁰¹⁶

For this reason all versions of atonement theory that are rooted in the restoration of Justice through the means of a payment of death or punishment must be rejected. “Satisfaction atonement, in any of its variants, is atonement that assumes divinely authored and divinely sanctioned violence of the death penalty as the means to restore justice, as the basis of salvation. Satisfaction atonement is based on an intrinsically

¹⁰¹⁴ “The theology of satisfaction, I contend, provided one of the subtlest and most profound of such justifications, not only for hanging but for retributive punishment in general.” Gorringer, 12.

¹⁰¹⁵ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰¹⁶ “Anselm regards *satisfactio* as ‘compensating penalty’,” and “The phrase ‘substitutionary satisfaction’ would not be inappropriate. Man ought to make the satisfaction, but the *Deus-homo* substitutes Himself for man and achieves that end to the honour of God.” McIntyre, 1954, 87, 172.

violent assumption - restoring justice means punishment.”¹⁰¹⁷ No matter how it is concealed, Jesus’ death is used vicariously to save a guilty humanity from the punishment or debt they deserve so they can enjoy the benefits of salvation. It also reinforces the notions of victim-hood where to passively suffer, even in situations of exploitation or abuse, is a noble thing with religious merit attached because it emulates Jesus’ submissive and obedient death.¹⁰¹⁸ Even when the reality is camouflaged with fashionable notions of God the Father suffering in unison with his Son, the terror of abandonment on the Cross, the God we are dealing with is still really a vengeful God who lusts for blood and payment. More trenchantly still, just because God suffers in the process it doesn’t actually change anything in the grand scheme of things. As Karl Rahner says with a degree of dry cynicism: “To put it very primitively - it does not help me at all to get out of my dirty mess and my despair just because things are going just as badly for God.”¹⁰¹⁹ Satisfaction may have started as an innocuous method of settlement to secure salvation by restoring God’s honour, but very soon “absolute revenge takes its place, and therefore Christ’s death is a displacement or substitute for that revenge. It was immediately possible, therefore, that the idea of penal substitution would break out once more from the tight reciprocities of satisfaction.”¹⁰²⁰

¹⁰¹⁷ Weaver, 201.

¹⁰¹⁸ Weaver, J. Denny, in: Barrow, 50.

¹⁰¹⁹ Rahner, Karl (1986), *Dialogue: Conversations and interviews, 1965-1982*, Crossroad, New York, 126.

¹⁰²⁰ Bartlett, 85.

The wrath of God

This leads us to contemplate the notion of God's wrath. Penal substitution is seen as God venting his spleen and punishing Jesus in our place.¹⁰²¹ Forgiveness and mercy are concepts squeezed to the sidelines in favour of satisfying the revenge of the Father.¹⁰²² Ideas of cosmic child abuse obviously come tumbling in which cannot be dismissed by claims that the Son is complicit; for this simply adds a masochist twist to the sadistic action.¹⁰²³ Penal substitution also clings to the more primitive notion buried in the atavistic archives of a sacrificial mindset of averting the wrath or displeasure of a god. God's anger needs to be averted or appeased. Some contemporary supporters of penal substitution excavate the biblical data and utilize the night of the Passover as an archetypal referent for how Christ's blood averts the wrath of God.¹⁰²⁴ The blood of the lamb smeared on the door posts of the Hebrews deflects God's destructive anger, yet on closer inspection it is the angel of death¹⁰²⁵ and not God himself who inflicts injury. The blood isn't used as a gift to ensure propitiation, but an element in a redemptive equation to break the stubborn heart of Pharaoh. The night of the Passover is a jail break from the bondage of slavery into a night of liberation heading towards the Promised Land. In the Old Testament God's anger is always linked to the purging of sin, and targets acts of infidelity that compromise the covenant and penetratingly to sin itself. God's anger is not a sustained disposition, a face of the divine which needs to be averted, but a mechanism

¹⁰²¹ "Jesus' death on the Cross is revealed in the light of his resurrection as the punishment suffered in our place for the blasphemous existence of humanity." Pannenberg, Wolfhart (2002), *Jesus-God and Man*, SCM Classics, London, 273.

¹⁰²² Pitstick, 130.

¹⁰²³ Ibid., 140.

¹⁰²⁴ Jeffery, Steve., Ovey, Mike & Sach, Andrew (2007), *Pierced For Our Transgressions. Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution*, Inter-varsity Press, Nottingham, England, 34, 38 (see Exodus 12:1-50).

¹⁰²⁵ Also referred to as "the destroyer". Exodus 12:23.

calculated to humble those to a point of capitulation and readiness to receive salvation. “Two things are established in the Old Testament: that God’s wrath or displeasure at human sin is never equated with righteousness. His righteousness, like his holiness, is an enduring predicate of Yahweh and declares his will to accept man into fellowship with him; the ‘wrath’ is reserved for individual acts of judgment, which exercise a function of this covenantal will; the punishment passes away, but the blessing endures.”¹⁰²⁶ The Old Testament does not speak of the sacrificial system as being an elaborate piece of machinery to protect people from the moodiness, displeasure and ultimate wrath of God.¹⁰²⁷ To the contrary, what emerges on closer scrutiny, is a God who is quick to forgive, generous with his mercy and instantly recognized by his compassion,¹⁰²⁸ all of which is celebrated in the penitential Psalms.¹⁰²⁹

God’s Wrath in the Old Testament (and the biblical corpus as a whole) is not about what God actively does, but the fertile traps that are laid when a wrong act is plotted. Sin is deconstructive by nature and contains within it the seeds of its own demise.¹⁰³⁰ In fact from an etymological point of view the Old Testament is devoid of any one single word exclusively for punishment; words such as sin, crime and evil deeds always have embedded within them the nuance of disaster, destruction and ruin.¹⁰³¹ One always in the end gets sucked into the negative slipstream that one has initiated. The biblical principle is clear: “*you reap what you sow*”,¹⁰³² God merely gives the individual space to be the architect of their own ruin. He allows individuals to

¹⁰²⁶ Balthasar, 1989, 205.

¹⁰²⁷ Jeffery, 48.

¹⁰²⁸ Hosea 11: 8ff.

¹⁰²⁹ Fee, Gordon D., in: Davies, Stephen, 59.

¹⁰³⁰ Psalm 2 v16-17.

¹⁰³¹ Schwager, 1999, 21.

¹⁰³² Galatians 6:7.

inadvertently punish themselves. “God’s judgment upon sin is the abandoning of sinners to a situation without him, so that they are left under the power of sin and false gods that cannot save, and the end result is death. That is the nature of judgment, in that God wills it to be so. It leaves sinners to their sin.”¹⁰³³ God’s anger is thus synonymous with judgment where God respects our freedom even to the vertiginous point of self-destruction and ultimate damnation. “The wrath of God is not understood as something which God does actively, but is rather the condition of human involvement in the murderous lie ... God is described as handing us over to ourselves: this is the content of the wrath.”¹⁰³⁴ The only route out from the blind alley of self-induced ruin is by genuine repentance.¹⁰³⁵ Until this happens God is perceived as the enemy. As long as people are trapped in their sin, in prisons of their own making, God is sensed as a frightening and hostile alien power.¹⁰³⁶

In the New Testament a similar trajectory for the word *wrath* is played out. Wrath is not a punitive shock wave from the throne of God aimed at individuals but its aim is to create a spirit of repentance, a broken heart and radical conversion. Karl Barth can therefore say that the *wrath* of God is in fact the fire of God’s Love.¹⁰³⁷ It is not about punishment but refinement, rehabilitation and ultimately reconciliation. Wrath as divine punishment only crops up a handful of times in the New Testament, mainly in the Pauline corpus and the book of revelation, but it is always linked to a future day of judgement.¹⁰³⁸ The “Lamb’s wrath in Revelation is not to mete out revenge and retribution but to lead people to repent, be reconciled to God, and thus be delivered

¹⁰³³ Marshall, 61.

¹⁰³⁴ Alison, James (1996), *Raising Abel: The Recovery of Eschatological Imagination*, Crossroad, New York, 46-47, 168.

¹⁰³⁵ Ormerod, 157.

¹⁰³⁶ Schwager, 1999, 196.

¹⁰³⁷ Barth, 94.

¹⁰³⁸ Rom. 2:5; Rom. 12:19; Col. 3:6; Eph. 5:6; 1Thess. 1:10.

from the powers of evil: Satan, the beast, and the idolatrous empire.”¹⁰³⁹ In the book of Revelation Jesus is also referred to as the one who “treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty”.¹⁰⁴⁰ God’s wrath, therefore, has a clear end of time eschatological dimension. There is no escaping the future judgement and the inevitable crushing of the sinners’ chosen way of life,¹⁰⁴¹ for God’s anger is, if anything, an unambiguous referent to God’s abhorrence and categorical ‘no’ to sin.

However, the seven bowls of wrath mentioned in Revelation 16 have more the function of purging and purification than wanton destruction, they indicate a critical time is upon the Christians of Rome to renounce allegiance with the beast (the Roman Empire) and resist its mark. The seven bowls show “God’s wrath, in hating and destroying evil, which serves the purpose of cleansing creation to prepare for the new heavens and new earth, the culmination of Revelation’s gospel vision.”¹⁰⁴² Christ in the Book of Revelation is depicted as the angry man, the eschatological judge. It would be antithetical to the purpose of the New Testament to see Jesus as a recipient of this anger; for God’ anger in the New Testament is never connected directly to the suffering and death of Christ, but only to sin.¹⁰⁴³ For those anxious to detect echoes of wrath in the New Testament suggestive of a violent exchange in the divine economy will be disappointed. The notorious text in Galatians 3:13¹⁰⁴⁴ which refers to Jesus as becoming a *curse* for us is often cited as a text to support penal substitution. It has been interpreted as Jesus suffering a divine curse instead of us, but Paul omits any such reference. Jesus dies the death of a criminal and to all intents and purposes one

¹⁰³⁹ Swartley, Willard M. (2006), *Covenant of Peace. The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics*, Wm B. Eerdmann Publishing CO., Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K., 336.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Rev.19:15. See Jeffery, 124.

¹⁰⁴¹ See: Marshall, 18.

¹⁰⁴² Swartley, 2006, 337.

¹⁰⁴³ O’Collins. Gerard, In: Davies, Stephen, 2.

¹⁰⁴⁴“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us - for it is written ‘cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.’”

defeated or cursed by the law. Paradoxically in the process he liberates us *from that* process and any vain attempt to cling to law as a sure route to justification. If those who administer the law use it as a blunt instrument against the Son of God it's unlikely we will fare any better. Law is a notoriously unsafe investment to rely on in securing salvation.¹⁰⁴⁵ In the Pauline corpus there is no explicit reference to God's anger as a projectile bearing down on any one individual. "The representation of direct punishment by an external authority is not once indicated by Paul. The anger consists entirely in the fact that God hands people over to the dynamic and inner logic of those passions, and of that depraved thinking, which they themselves have awakened in their turning away from God. Thus God's anger means that God fully respects the evil that people do with all its consequences."¹⁰⁴⁶ Christ, on the Cross does not placate an angry God, even in the book of Hebrews, where Jesus' death is linked specifically to sacrifice.¹⁰⁴⁷ God's wrath then, is an indicator of what lies ahead and expresses the urgency and state of emergency that now exists, a ripeness of time to make a decision irrevocably for the kingdom of God, for *today* is the day of salvation.¹⁰⁴⁸

Many, however, are unwilling to jettison the anthropomorphic visage of wrath and the need for God's anger. Notions of justice are clearly entangled with vigilante aspirations connected with the need to be tough on crime, which equates with a more dogmatic and rigid administration of justice. Clemency is equated with leniency and divine hospitality with naivety; for it only succeeds in opening the doors of the

¹⁰⁴⁵ O'Collins, Gerald S.J. (2007), *Jesus our Redeemer. A Christian Approach to Salvation*, Oxford University Press, 153.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Schwager, 1999, 165.

¹⁰⁴⁷ "The idea that through his 'single sacrifice for sins' (Heb. 10:12) Christ placated an angry God seems quite foreign to Hebrews and its teaching. Hebrews never speaks of placation and only twice of God's 'anger' but never of anger in connection with Christ and his suffering." O'Collins, 165.

¹⁰⁴⁸ 2 Corin. 6:2.

kingdom to all and sundry: “We would open the door not just to the good person but also to the Devil to come in.”¹⁰⁴⁹ Violence, therefore, is seen as a necessary evil, it acts like a metaphysical bouncer to keep out those unworthy of the eschatological banquet. “Restorative justice cannot function without due regard for the need for punishment. Ironically, by cutting out the wrath and violence of God in an attempt to hold up his love, we end up losing the very thing we are trying to safeguard: the restoration of shalom and, therefore, the enjoyment of the presence of God’s love.”¹⁰⁵⁰ Ironically, the Kingdom of heaven is open to all, and if those invited to the wedding feast will not come God extends the boundaries to include both the deserving and undeserving.¹⁰⁵¹ God’s restorative justice and Shalom will not be deterred by the parsimonious attitude of the self-righteous. Yet notions of God’s anger still lingered. In medieval times when Christ was presented as a wrathful Lord, Mary, the Mother of God, became the welcome refuge of sinners who would not dare to turn to Christ himself. In the chronicles of the Franciscans (compiled in 1360 and 1370) brother Leo, a companion to St Francis, has a dream of the last judgement. His Franciscan brethren are assembled at the foot of two ladders that ascend to heaven, one white, the other red. “At the top of the red ladder stands a wrathful Christ. St. Francis calls his disciple to climb the red ladder; but he is unable: he falls. Francis prays for him, but Christ displays his wounds and declares, ‘Your brothers have done this to me.’ Francis then leads Leo to the white ladder, which he climbs easily, to find the Virgin Mary awaiting him at the top.”¹⁰⁵²

¹⁰⁴⁹ Boersma, Hans, 2004, 178.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Boersama, Hans, in Sanders, 65.

¹⁰⁵¹ Matthew 22:8-10.

¹⁰⁵² *Chronica XXIV Generalium Ordinis Minorum*, cited in Viladesau, 162.

St Thomas Aquinas

Even Peter Abelard, who developed a far more attractive model of the atonement based on God's transforming Love, pens some revealing lines in a hymn he wrote for Holy week to the nuns of the convent of *The Paraclete*. Christ is clearly presented as a substitute for our punishment, so that we in turn may enjoy the benefits of heaven and forgiveness.¹⁰⁵³ St Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologia* also makes the point that God's severity is manifested in the way that he is unwilling to remit sin without punishment.¹⁰⁵⁴ Therefore "Christ's passion provided adequate, and more than adequate satisfaction for man's sin and debt, his passion was as it were the price of punishment by which we are freed from both obligations."¹⁰⁵⁵ Christ's passion works because it effectively delivers humankind from the debt of punishment by making adequate satisfaction, which is the cause of the forgiveness of sins.¹⁰⁵⁶ Naturally, Aquinas' approach to the atonement is more complex than this, and indeed he incorporates a cluster of metaphors to do full justice to the significance of the Cross. In one passage a number of metaphors are compressed together which include *Merit, Satisfaction, Punishment, Redemption, Sacrifice and Reconciliation* all rolled into one, found in article 6, of question 48 which addresses the question: *Did Christ's passion bring about our salvation as an efficient cause?* He replies: "When Christ's passion is viewed in relation to his divinity, it can be seen to act in an efficient way; in

¹⁰⁵³ "Alone you go to be a sacrificial victim Lord,
Offering yourself to the death you came to take away;
What can we say, we wretched people,
Who know that you pay the penalty for the sins we committed?
Ours, Lord, ours are the sins whose punishment you bear.
Make our hearts suffer along with you,
So that by that very suffering we may deserve forgiveness."

Petrus Abaelardus, "Hymnarius Praclitensis", In *Parasceve Domini*, cited in Viladesau, 84.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Aquinas, 1965, 63.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Ibid., (3a.48,4), 85.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Ibid., (3a.49,3), 103.

relation to the will which is rooted in Christ's soul, by way of merit; in relation to the very flesh of Christ, by way of satisfaction, since we are freed by it from the guilt of punishment; by way of redemption, inasmuch as we are thereby freed from the slavery of sin; and finally, by way of sacrifice, thanks to which we are reconciled to God."¹⁰⁵⁷ He also reiterates the central idea found in Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo?* that a ransom payment for humanity's freedom isn't paid to the Devil put directly to God,¹⁰⁵⁸ and for good measure there is also a whiff of the classic Christus Victor model when he says that the Cross is an effective self-defence against the evil one. "The remedy prepared by Christ's passion is always available to man for self-defense against the wickedness of the devils, even in the time of Antichrist."¹⁰⁵⁹ Aquinas, therefore, brings a rich and synthesizing approach to the atonement, but along with his contemporaries he has no qualms stating, that thanks to the Passion, the cause for hatred between God and Man has been removed, because sin has been wiped away and compensation made with a more agreeable offering, which is a far greater reason for reconciliation with the human race than wrath.¹⁰⁶⁰

Wrath then, has always cast some dark shadow over the redemptive landscape but it should never be equated with violence emanating from God, for the Cross is fundamentally about the disclosure of human violence. Indeed it only muddies the waters and negates the clarity of the Cross as the supreme revealer of the sin of the world, the ubiquity of human violence, if it attempts in anyway to lift it up and project it onto the Cross as some divinely sanctioned construct.¹⁰⁶¹ More realistically, one can contemplate that on the Cross Jesus suffers the extremity of what it is to be human.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Ibid., (3a.48,6), 91-93.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Ibid., (3a.48,4), 87.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Ibid., (3a.49,2), 101.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Ibid., (3a.49, 4), 107.

¹⁰⁶¹ Bartlett, 224.

The wrath of God is the purifying principle that seeks to reverse the vortex of negativity, the overwhelming centrifugal tendency that sin induces. God's wrath is thus a stabilizing force because it is rooted in the creativity of love. God's wrath tests Jesus authenticity and desire not to give up, to be obedient to his call to be fully human and in response freely offer up his life back to the Father. "By freely offering Himself as the sacrifice which had to be made when God vindicated Himself in relation to man, by choosing to suffer the wrath of God in His own body and the fire of His love in His own soul. It was in that way that He was obedient. It was in that way that He was the righteous One."¹⁰⁶² Jesus dies a death of exclusion from the community, a community which he seeks to heal, for he goes to the furthest point, to the very outer rim of nonbeing¹⁰⁶³ to ensure that no one else has to trespass here; no one else has to die this death of eternal damnation.¹⁰⁶⁴ For some, he even becomes the target of our own anger, like the proverbial and long-suffering scapegoat. Yet he not only dies a cursed death by sharing our horror participation, he effectively calms our anger by showing solidarity with us and even allowing any excess anger to do its worst to God.¹⁰⁶⁵ Jesus on the Cross thus sublimely indicates that God's Wrath is always infinitely more healing than our own, because fundamentally it is rooted in love and only love redeems. For it appears that "God's cup had flowed over with plenty; from wrath, one could have thought. But when God thunders, the cloud of wrath pours out a rustling love."¹⁰⁶⁶

¹⁰⁶² Barth, 95.

¹⁰⁶³ "At last I neared that mysterious and final spot on the very edge of being, and then the fall into the void, the capsizing into the bottomless abyss, the vertigo, the finale, the un-becoming: that colossal death which only I have died. Through my death this has been spared you, and no one will ever experience what it really means to die: This was my victory." Balthasar, 1979, 175.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Pannenberg, 295.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Adams, 277.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Balthasar, 1979, 38.

The Kingdom of God ushers in a state of peace and forgiveness

Jesus' death was therefore not something desired by the Father to balance some cosmic equation,¹⁰⁶⁷ it was the by-product of an inevitable confrontation with evil that calculated on entrapment and execution as a means of extinguishing the threat from the Son of God.¹⁰⁶⁸ Violence emanates not from God but from the dark corners of history and the forces aligned that oppose Jesus. Ultimately, violence becomes the favoured medium of unprincipled individuals who secure their tenuous grip on power by responding with violence. All human communities depressingly end in the oppression of the weak by the strong, the good by the corrupt. "All structures of communication that we develop turn eventually with a terrible inevitability into structures of domination - no longer ways of sharing life with another but of taking life from another. In the end, every human society becomes structured by violence."¹⁰⁶⁹ Violence becomes the preferred weapon of those whose existence is threatened by being exposed by the virtue of others, people whose life style implies a criticism of their own. As Plato sententiously predicated before the birth of Christ the just man will be roundly persecuted *because* he is just.¹⁰⁷⁰ Jesus' death therefore may be a direct result of engaging with the powers of evil, routing them from their burrows, but his mission was to usher in the kingdom of God which is one of peace. "Peace be with you!"¹⁰⁷¹ is his first utterance to the disciples after the resurrection thus revealing that the Kingdom of God is not built on the politics of revenge or counter-violence. Redemption happens when there is a resistance to evil and the

¹⁰⁶⁷ Weaver, Denny, J. in: Barrow, 52.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Matthew 2:13.

¹⁰⁶⁹ McCabe, 96.

¹⁰⁷⁰ "They will tell you that the just man who is thought unjust will be scourged, racked, bound will have his eyes burnt out; and, at last, after suffering every kind of evil, he will be impaled." (*Socrates to Glaucon*). Plato (1993), *The Republic*, Oxford World's Classics, Oxford University Press.

¹⁰⁷¹ Luke 24:36.

unmasking of its cynical use of debt, credit and payment for any slights received or perceived. “Jesus’ mission was not to die but to make visible the reign of God, it is quite explicit that neither God nor the reign of God *needs* Jesus’ death in the way that his death is irreducibly *needed* in satisfaction atonement.”¹⁰⁷² Jesus’ death is ultimately the contrast between the non-violent reign of God and the rule of evil,¹⁰⁷³ which openly traffics in raw retributive justice. This is the Justice of Hell, because it neither seeks nor desires restoration, but only insists on payback through punishment motivated by revenge. What is required for authentic reconciliation, is a form of justice that restores fellowship through the extending of the costly olive branch of forgiveness. Only by entering into the furthestmost depths of human violence without reserve and with a spirit of non-retaliatory forgiveness can relationships be healed, fellowship restored and the pain of alienation ameliorated; for only true atonement restores the ethics of paradise lost.

Jesus’ ministry was one characterized by forgiveness, the easing and relieving people from the guilt and burden of sin.¹⁰⁷⁴ When Peter asked whether he should forgive seven times any injury, Jesus responded by saying that he should forgive seventy-seven times,¹⁰⁷⁵ a perfect number seventy times over thus hinting at an infinite amount; and his teaching on anger and the desire for retribution was equally clear.¹⁰⁷⁶ It is characteristic of bruised human nature to nurse resentment and seek revenge, but this in the long run only makes the initial wound fatal. However justified, our unforgiveness will ultimately be the undoing of us. For anger, hatred, bitterness and revenge are death-dealing spirits whose ultimate aim is to possess us to the point

¹⁰⁷² Weaver, 72.

¹⁰⁷³ Weaver, Denny, J. in: Barrow, 57.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Schwager, 1999, 104.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Matt. 18:21-22.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Matt. 5:21-22.

where they destroy us.¹⁰⁷⁷ But true forgiveness is also costly, for the one who forgives suffers, yet by its very nature it is also unconditional, for forgiveness cannot be demanded or expected but always has the extraordinary quality of unmerited gift. Reconciliation cannot be earned but it inevitably does come at a price.¹⁰⁷⁸ Retributive justice ensures that perpetrators pay full compensation and something extra for the wrong inflicted, but restorative justice seeks fellowship through forgiveness. God's justice is always restorative for "forgiveness so conceived is compassion for the enemy even as the enemy displays only strength, cruelty, and oppression. It is a dream of the enemy as friend."¹⁰⁷⁹ It is a risky undertaking because true reconciliation exposes the vulnerability of the pain of the injury inflicted. It dare not hide from the truth, but takes both the perpetrators, and victims, need for healing deadly seriously, confronting the very rupture in the relationship. "There is another kind of justice, restorative justice, which was characteristic of traditional African jurisprudence. Here the central concern is not retribution or punishment but, in the spirit of *ubuntu*, the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships."¹⁰⁸⁰

Yet for reconciliation to work there has to be forgiveness from the offended and penitence (repentance)¹⁰⁸¹ from the offender. There can be no disregarding of the gravity of the offence caused, for the truth of the situation of the victim has to be fully acknowledged, otherwise the victim is effectively re-victimised and power shifts back

¹⁰⁷⁷ Tutu, Desmond (1999), *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Rider Press, Johannesburg, 122.

¹⁰⁷⁸ "The power to forgive is not obtained for nothing, it must be bought at a price, it must be paid for with the suffering of him who has been sinned against." Quick, O.C., cited in Brummer, 41, 43.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Bartlett, 157.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Tutu, 51.

¹⁰⁸¹ "No reconciliation, no forgiveness and no negotiations are possible *without repentance*. The biblical teaching on reconciliation and forgiveness makes it quite clear that nobody can be forgiven and reconciled with God unless he or she repents of their sins." (*Challenge to the Church, a Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa*, publication of the Programme to Combat Racism of the World Council of Churches, November 1985.) Cited in Brummer, 48.

to the abuser who is reconfirmed in their role.¹⁰⁸² True forgiveness has to do with openness and then the putting away of enmity, the remission of guilt, which can only be initiated by a process of love.¹⁰⁸³ There can be no being trapped in the endless cycle of payment and repayment for as the parable of the unforgiving servant suggests, the demand for debt collection can only escalate. It escalates to the point where in desperation one realizes that one can't pay, and then one is left to the caprice of the jailor and his private torture chamber. "And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay off all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."¹⁰⁸⁴ To break the cynical cycle of parsimony requires the generosity of mercy, which we can try to emulate but which only God can truly supply. The Cross is a symbol not of payback and debt collection but one of unrivalled forgiveness, a rich currency of compassion. For reconciliation on the Cross is fundamentally a deed of divine love initiated for enemies *whilst they are still enemies*.¹⁰⁸⁵ "There is no limit to Christ's forgiveness, his gift of himself in the darkness of human violence and abandonment. And the very quality of this 'no limit' resists, subverts, overturns the hitherto irresistible damnation of death. Where before a death inevitably ends in the rictus of the corpse; the sign of violence triumphant, in the Cross, the event of the Crucified, it is changed endlessly into a glance of compassion."¹⁰⁸⁶ Penal substitution only removes sin seen as guilt rather than as estrangement,¹⁰⁸⁷ it does little to effect deep and lasting reconciliation. It has more the character of a cold and commercial transaction in an anonymous bank

¹⁰⁸² Ormerod, 158.

¹⁰⁸³ Spence, Alan (2006), *The Promise of Peace. A Unified Theory of the Atonement*, T&T Clark, London & New York, 46.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Matt. 18:43-35.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Schwager, 1999, 160.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Bartlett, 154.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Brummer, 77.

vault,¹⁰⁸⁸ where pain, punishment and humiliation are also inflicted for good measure, rather than the restoration of friendship in the loving embrace of the God-man Jesus. Jesus' suffering on the Cross can never be a condition of forgiveness but it is a direct expression of the lengths that God is prepared to go in a generous act of forgiveness.¹⁰⁸⁹ Like the Akedah and the sacrifice of Abraham's son Isaac,¹⁰⁹⁰ God gives his all for reconciliation.¹⁰⁹¹

The Cross is a prayer and the music of salvation

Jesus on the Cross dies praying and in so doing he fashioned death into an act of prayer and a supreme act of worship itself.¹⁰⁹² "For the Cross is a prayer and, indeed, the only prayer known to Christians. All our prayers are prayers only by sharing in the prayer of the Cross, the exchange between Jesus and the Father in which Jesus offered the whole of his life to the Father and the Father raised him from the dead."¹⁰⁹³ Christ secures the atonement of the human race through this basic humble act of intercession,¹⁰⁹⁴ it is a request for reconciliation to the Father from the Son whom he cannot refuse.¹⁰⁹⁵ Christ's role then is simply to ask for forgiveness where in the

¹⁰⁸⁸ Although the commercial and economic implications of the word "debt" are emphasised, for St Anselm this would to some extent be a caricature of his position because for him the primary significance of the term is religious and moral. See McIntyre, 1954, 73.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Brummer, 87.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Genesis 22:1-19.

¹⁰⁹¹ John 3:16.

¹⁰⁹² Ratzinger, Joseph (Pope Benedict XVI) (1986), *Behold The Pierced One*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 22.

¹⁰⁹³ McCabe, 100.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Winter, 113. For St Anselm supplication and the prayer for forgiveness is actually part of the payment of debt. See McIntyre, 1954, 105.

¹⁰⁹⁵ "The satisfaction for man's sin is not offered by man but by the God-man through the special merits of His Death. That offering does not, of itself, redeem all men and erase their sins. They must appropriate 'the benefits of His death', and they do so by some such prayer as Boso quotes. The prayer for forgiveness is actually part of the payment as a result of which forgiveness comes to the sinner." McIntyre, 1954, 105.

process there is a radical healing of love.¹⁰⁹⁶ His death in effect becomes an act of glorification, and unlike the Gnostic cross of light that is concealed behind the symbol of the wooden earthly structure,¹⁰⁹⁷ the real Cross becomes a sacrament of the Church. Through the wood of the Cross (as articulated in the Anglo-Saxon poem in *The Dream of the Rood*¹⁰⁹⁸), there is the gateway to paradise. Men were prevented from entering the heavenly kingdom by sin and the gate remained firmly shut; but by Christ's passion, Christ merited for us the opening up of the kingdom of heaven by removing the pernicious obstacle of sin. "Through Christ's passion however we are delivered not only from the sin of the entire human race both as regards the sin and the debt of punishment (for Christ paid the price of our ransom), but also from our own sins, provided we share in his passion by faith, love, and the sacraments of faith. Thus through Christ's passion we find the door of the heavenly kingdom open."¹⁰⁹⁹ By his resurrection and ascension¹¹⁰⁰ we are led by Christ into the heavenly Kingdom.

And once inside the gates of heaven which have been opened up by the wood of the Cross and the Passion of Christ which it supported, is the sound of music heard from that sweet and blessed country, played on nothing less than the proverbial harp. Cassidorius writes: "The harp signifies the glorious Passion which with stretched sinews and counted bones sounded forth his bitter suffering as a spiritual song." Indeed, every mention of the harp in the Old Testament can be taken as a symbolic referent to the crucifixion, where Christ on the Cross evokes the idea of stretching,

¹⁰⁹⁶ Ratzinger, 96.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Apocryphal Acts of John, 98 in James, M. R. (1960), *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 254-255.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Viladesau, 60.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Aquinas, 1965, Article 5 *Did Christ's Passion open for us the gates of heaven?* 111.

¹¹⁰⁰ "The soteriological significance of the ascended Christ's intercession meant that the resurrection itself was considered as having atoning value. 'He was delivered to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification' (Rom.4:25)." Spence, 42. Aquinas *also* mentions the significance of the ascension in the soteriological act of the atonement. Aquinas, 1965, 111.

with arms taut and ribs showing, like the strings of an instrument. So we can say without hyperbole; “The harp itself is like the crucifix, since it is made of wood, with animal gut stretched on it; Christ on the Cross is like the harp of God, on which God’s ‘music’ of salvation is played-by the striking of the strings.”¹¹⁰¹ Yet Jesus is struck on the Cross not by blows of punishment or wounds designed to seek satisfaction, but by grace upon grace. Wicked men may have placed him there, and his human condition may reflect extreme solidarity with us; yet it takes seriously the reality of sin that acts as a barrier between us and God. In him reconciliation is affected and sanctification renewed, that mysterious transformation or deification through the movement of grace, which heals and restores, and is made available only to those with faith, itself a gift. The Cross of Jesus is thus the only place where Heaven and Hell meet, the cross-road of salvation, for in the end, “In the whole event of atonement, justification, sanctification and calling, as grounded in the divine verdict, direction and promise, have as it were a central function. In them, in the understanding of grace under these concepts, it is still a matter of expounding the being and work of Jesus Christ as the Reconciler of the sinful world and therefore of sinful man with God. It is still a matter, then, of what took place in Him for the conversion of the world to God. That is how it must be to the very end.”¹¹⁰²

¹¹⁰¹ Viladesau, 118.

¹¹⁰² Barth, 147.

Conclusion.

In this thesis the Cross of Jesus takes centre stage because quite simply Christians have always regarded it as the supreme act of redemption and the place of salvation for humanity.¹¹⁰³ I started by suggesting that exploring the Church's teaching on the doctrine of the atonement is akin to diving in deep waters, where exploring treasures from this redemptive salvage can be overwhelming yet fruitful. "Like the pearl-diver's hand trembling under water; towards his store of food and beauty",¹¹⁰⁴ for the gospel also reminds us that: "the Kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it."¹¹⁰⁵ The irreducible pluralism of metaphors in atonement theology ensures that there can never really be one metaphor commanding special place in the overall doctrine of salvation. This may naturally lead to an array of perplexing and often competing images which seem to cloud the waters rather than strive for clarity or perspicacity. Nevertheless, this rich unity in diversity approach towards these images should be retained so as to do full justice to the soteriological significance of the Cross.

However, it should always be asked how and in what way do these metaphors essentially relate to each other? If they are combined, should one metaphor take primacy in order to control and in some way steer this cluster into more languid and clearer pools of analytical reflection? Perhaps the solution lies in the creative space in between words when these metaphors are held in tension. Atonement language is

¹¹⁰³ Dillistone, F. W. (1946), *The Significance of The Cross*, Lutterworth Press, London, 10.

¹¹⁰⁴ Conquest, R. (1988), *New and Collected Poems*, Hutchinson, London, 32.

¹¹⁰⁵ Matthew 13:45.

historically embedded within the tradition as products of a particular time, place and culture. For that reason they may often appear to falter and miss the mark to a contemporary ear, yet they are still part of a historical doctrinal development and heritage. Each separate metaphor will naturally mirror the overriding concerns of its day, and the task is to establish whether any of these singularly distinctive metaphors can be brought together to form some kind of dialectical relationship of familiarity. Indeed the “twentieth-century British atonement theology was heavily dominated by the belief that there are several independent theories, images or metaphors of the atonement with no significant interconnection. They are treated in one of two ways: either by seeing them as a collection of understandings from which only one need be selected...or from which several or all should be held together in some balance.”¹¹⁰⁶

In this thesis I have analysed the main soteriological lines of enquiry and have indicated that there is a fertile tension and overlap between the metaphors of: *sacrifice*, the *scapegoat* as expounded by René Girard (with violence being isolated as the primitive drive and problem in society) where both lead towards the metaphor of *reconciliation*, which subsumes them into itself. Added to this mix is Abelard’s insight that it is *love* that motivates and binds the whole redemptive process together. *Ransom and rescue* are seen to orbit this dense cluster of metaphors because humanity always requires liberation from sin, death and alienation. It is this cluster or arrangement of metaphors that I propose is the most persuasive and convincing for a contemporary understanding of the atonement. Although I was critical of Anselm’s satisfaction theory, preferring to see Abelard’s insight as the great idea and missed opportunity of the medieval period, it would be an oversimplification to see these two

¹¹⁰⁶ Terry, 42.

redemption theories as warring for precedence in the later middle ages.¹¹⁰⁷ However, I believe that I have demonstrated that Anselm still inadvertently lays the foundations for later penal satisfaction theories which forensically focus on the death of the Messiah. These lead to more rustic and transactional models of redemption (penal substitution), that I have deliberately excluded as they are classic epistemological traps¹¹⁰⁸ from which it is difficult to break free. Yet the strength of atonement theology is the existence of the sheer variety of images, which means that the Cross can never be reduced to one exclusive hermeneutical system alone, for this would empty the Cross of its power and meaning.

As stated at the outset, however, the death and resurrection of Jesus should always be seen together, for his death is meaningless without God's intervention which alone gives the Cross significance,¹¹⁰⁹ for "on the third day He rose again, according to the scriptures."¹¹¹⁰ However, for the purposes of this thesis it was necessary to focus exclusively on the Cross in order to come to a deeper understanding of what is achieved at this point in the drama of salvation. It is true that the totality of Christ's life, death and resurrection, seen as a redemptive sweep, is wholly salvific; but it remains the case that it is "particularly through his death, because it was there that the whole process came to its focus, the relationship was restored and the way opened for man to live anew according to God's original design".¹¹¹¹ The Cross reveals God's glory, albeit paradoxically through humiliation and weakness,¹¹¹² the antithetical position to the posturing and swagger of the world. "For the word of the Cross is folly

¹¹⁰⁷ Bynum, 199.

¹¹⁰⁸ Steiner, 170.

¹¹⁰⁹ Hooker, 139

¹¹¹⁰ Nicene Creed (AD 325).

¹¹¹¹ Dillistone (1946), 103.

¹¹¹² Hooker, 141.

to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”¹¹¹³

The Cross is God’s sign of solidarity and hope within the tragedy of the human condition, where evil is not allowed to prevail. At the lowest point of despair, God’s response is unequivocally one of offering new life and glory. “It is the glory of the Christian Gospel to proclaim that God has entered into this situation in Christ to re-create and renew and - this surely is important - to make the splendour of the re-creation even more wonderful than that of creation itself. This is the process which, within this field of the imagination, we call the atonement.”¹¹¹⁴

There are indeed objective and subjective elements that are stressed in the various metaphors of the atonement, but the Cross itself operates symbolically as an iconic, denotative, totemic and liturgical sign, like a fork in the road it challenges for a response: “either to believe in and commit oneself to the God of Jesus Christ, or to conclude that human existence is in fact what on the surface it most certainly appears to be, namely...a meaningless waste of effort and suffering, ending in a silence of universal death.”¹¹¹⁵ For the Church, the Cross became a universal sign of faith, hope and love and emblematic of its own identity, and for ancient Christianity it also became physically associated with prayer and blessing;¹¹¹⁶ as Tertullian writing in the second century elaborated: “At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, on couch, on seat, in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign of the Cross.”¹¹¹⁷ Indeed, making the sign of the Cross indicates the abiding soteriological significance of the Cross of Jesus for

¹¹¹³ 1 Corinthians 1:18.

¹¹¹⁴ Dillistone (1946), 152.

¹¹¹⁵ Farmer, Herbert, cited in Dillistone (1946), 191.

¹¹¹⁶ Andreopoulos, 85.

¹¹¹⁷ Tertullian, *De Corona*. Ch. III, 94. Cited in Stott, 28.

ordinary believers when they pray: “*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*”¹¹¹⁸ Amen.

¹¹¹⁸ Matthew 28:19.

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